BLESSINGTON'S FOLLY

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "LOVE ON SMOKY RIVER"

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Blessington's Folly

LOVE ON SMOKY RIVER

By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

Crown 8vo, 6s. Third Impression

THE TIMES.—"This is a well-handled story, with its clever mixture of love and adventure."

MORNING POST.—"A picture of life and adventure among the inhospitable forests and rivers of the desolate North. It is well worth reading, for the characters are interesting and the action brisk and stirring."

DAILY TELEGRAPH.—"The adventures in a little settlement on Smoky River and the romance of the people there—all these are keenly interesting. The story has many merits and those who like to read of a struggle, who enjoy reading of a fight as well as of love affairs, will by no means find the time wasted which is given to 'Love on Smoky River'."

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YORKSHIRE OBSERVER.—"This is a novel of action, of love, and adventure. The characters are finely drawn and the story works out to a dramatic climax."

JOHN LONG, LTD., LONDON

Blessington's Folly

By

Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of

"Love on Smoky River"

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BLESSINGTON'S FOLLY

CHAPTER I

THE BIG HOUSE AND THE ICE-LOCKED SCHOONER

It was April; but in Labrador the shore-ice still locked the coast, and the Greenland floes and bergs had not yet commenced to drift and grind their way southward.

The little harbour of Fore-and-Aft Cove lay flinty and frozen to aching depths. The little cabins of the cove stood grey among the black rocks and patches of frost-crisp snow, cheerless in the white, unthawing wash of the sun. Behind the harbour, beyond the seaward edge of the barrens, surrounded by thickets of stunted spruces, squatted a house. It squatted and sprawled, for it was a thing of only one story and sloping, shallow garrets. It was surely the largest building on the Labrador, with the exception of the Deep Sea Mission Hospital at Battle Harbour, far to the southward.

Blessington's Folly

This rough and sprawling habitation had a name, and was known by that name, like any gentleman's country-seat in a more civilized part of the world. It had been named "Blessington's Folly" by its builder, in hard-lipped self-derision —and it was known up and down that desolate coast as "The Folly". Sometimes it was spoken of as "The Folly, God bless it". From the outside it looked as if some gigantic animal of the beaver kind had dragged together a mass of such materials as lay nearest at hand on landwash, barren and wooded hill, and mounded all strongly and roughly for a place of winter retreat. The foundations were of uncut boulders; the low walls were of round spruce poles and small logs; the roofs were of smaller poles, covered here with bark and sods and there with hand-split shingles. Four low, massive chimneys bulged out from angles and faces of the walls, and a fifth thrust its heavy top through the centre of the main roof. The windows were small, of many small panes. Save when the sun flashed on the glasses of the windows, or lamps lit them at night, Blessington's Folly might well have been mistaken for a natural hummock or knoll.

From the front windows of the house, on this

April morning, could be seen the top of the fore-mast of a schooner, slim and black against the grey and white of the opposite slope of the cove. The schooner itself, a "fore-and-after," lay imprisoned in the hard sea-ice. She had lain there all winter. She was a trading schooner, the "Mary Brock" by name, and the name of her owner and skipper was Luke Cassin. Now Luke sat in the hold of his vessel, with his feet on the hearth of the little stove, and talked with two men of the harbour who had come aboard to feel the pulse of trade. If the pulse beat strong they intended to do business to the extent of a few pounds of tea and a bag of hard-bread each. But this sort of thing is not done in unseemly haste on the Labrador. Though the hatch was off, a lighted lantern hung from a deck-beam overhead. The place was stuffy with motionless, meaningless shadows, a reek of bilge, and merchandise, and peltries, a cold exhausted stench of dead tobacco-smoke. The fresh smoke which the men now blew from their lips did not mend matters, for their tobacco was of the worst. There was also a suggestion of Jamaica rum in the flat air—of rum, new boots, and salt fish.

"I can't make them out," said Luke Cassin. "I

can't make them out—and, by the livin' ginger, I don't like them! I ain't partial to the way them folks treat me—which is like a dog. Ain't I a man?—and a business man at that? Ain't I a white man? Hell, I'm mad! I've got pride, I have. I ain't a poor, ignorant *livyer*. Not me. What I want to know is, what do them stiff-necked lobsters cal'late themselves to be that's any better than an honest business man from Nova Scotia?"

Luke Cassin was about twenty-five years of age and a Nova Scotian. His forehead was narrow—too narrow for his jaws and chin and thick neck—and his eyes seemed to be bent upon undermining the bridge of his large and ungraceful nose.

"I ain't goin' to stand for it much longer!" he exclaimed. "They don't treat me civil. They don't pay no more attention to me than if I wasn't here at all. Ain't this the Labrador?—and ain't one man as good as another on the Labrador?"

"Aye, sir, this bes the Larboardore," remarked old Pat Whallen, sucking at his pipe. "Aye, sir, an' ye bes a business man—a kind o' marchant, in a sense—an' from Up-along. But they 'Folly' folk, sir—they be real quality."

"Quality!" cried the trader viciously. "Quality! Damn quality! There ain't no such

thing as quality on the Labrador, except in fish and fur. You'll be givin' me some hot air about quality in hell, next. Oh, you make me tired!"

Pat Whallen shot a shrewd and amused glance at young Mike Dormer.

"They 'Folly' folk has allus treated the folk hereabouts fair and dacent," said Dormer earnestly. "Aye, Mister Cassin, they has fed this harbour more nor once, when the ice hung on to the landwash longer nor we'd figgered on and the bread-bins went empty."

"An' ain't I fed you, too?" challenged Luke Cassin.

The two fishermen looked embarrassed. The elder one giggled. After a brief but painful silence the younger squared his heavy shoulders and looked steadily at the trader with his mild eyes.

"Aye, sir, ye've fed us; but ye've taken fish an' skins agin the tea an' flour—and where ye couldn't get neither fish nor fur ye've marked it down agin us in yer book," he said. "What we bain't able to pay for now we'll pay for nex' season. It bain't so wid 'The Folly' folk, Mister Cassin. They gives to the hungry an' the needy, God bless them—an' never a mark on paper do they put agin us."

"Is that the way of it?" sneered the trader. "They *give* you food, do they? Sure, and so they would—like you yourself would chuck frozen fish to your dogs. But you'll pay for it all some day—just as your dogs pay for the fish when you put the harness on to them. You bet, John Blessington never fed you for the love of you. He knows what he's about. The day'll come when you'll pay for every last cake of bread and pound of tea he ever chucked to you."

"Ye bes in the wrong o' it there, I takes my oath," said old Pat Whallen.

"If you had any decent pride you wouldn't take his food," said the trader. "Did ever any one of you sit down to table with him an' his wife an' his daughter? Tell me that?"

"Aye, the skipper have, an' likewise ol' Mother Trigg," replied Mike Dormer—"an' come Christmas every year don't the hull entire pack an' herd of us eat along with them up at 'The Folly'? Aye, sure we do—wid chiny and silver on to the table enough for to ballast this here fore-an'-after, an' port an' sherry wines for them as likes such, an' rum an' whisky for them as don't. Aye, Mister Cassin, that bes the sacred truth. And food, Holly Saint Patrick, sir, the grub! There bain't

a marchant in St. John's feeds grander nor we poor livyers feeds every Christmas Day, up to 'The Folly'."

"Pride and charity," sneered the trader. "The charity of false, high-nosed, stinkin' pride. Vanity! I'd like to see John Blessington, or his wife, or his daughter, hand out any of their damn charity to me. I got pride of my own."

"Sure ye have, skipper—an' ye bain't in need o' charity," said Pat Whallen. "We bes poor fisher-folk, sir, an' ye bes a rich trader—a smart, rich trader from Up-along. Sure, sir, ye wouldn't be needin' any man's charity."

"Then why ain't they civil to me?" asked Luke angrily. "Ain't I bin in this forsaken hole a matter of five months, frozen tight and tradin' honest? They'd ought to be glad to see a man from civilization in this darned place. But no! Not on yer life! Didn't I go up to the house first thing I got here, as sociable as you please, to swap yarns with Blessington? And how'd he treat me? Why no better than if I was some poor, ignorant fisherman. He didn't even ask me to stop to supper—and his wife and the girl didn't show their stuck-up noses. I don't know how Mister John Blessington, Esquire,

makes his livin', but I do know that I make mine honest."

The fishermen exchanged glances, the elder one slowly closing his left eye—the eye farthest from the irate trader. The master of the fore-and-after, still intent on his theme of injuries, slights, and injustice, smote his knee with his big right hand.

"I'll git even with them yet!" he cried. "I'll learn them that Luke Cassin ain't to be treated like a dog. No man alive can do that an' git away with it—an' no woman neither. I'll dig up John Blessington's history. He ain't hidin' away up here for nothing, you can bet on that. There's something wrong with your grand quality—something crooked. No man lives on the Labrador unless he damned well has to—or unless there's money in it. Blessington may be slick enough to fool a bunch of ignorant livyers, but he ain't smart enough to pull any wool over my eyes. If they'd treat me civil I'd leave them be—but they treat me as if I wasn't here at all."

Footsteps sounded on the frosty deck, and a shadow fell across the open hatch. The fishermen and the trader turned and peered upward and forward. The feet and legs of a man appeared at

the top of the short, steep-pitched ladder. They were encased in "skinnywoppers" of sealskin. The hips, the heavy coat, and the bearded face of the owner of the legs came slowly into view.

"Bill Sprowl, o' Fox River," said old Pat Whallen.

The trader changed colour slightly and got nimbly and silently to his feet. The visitor, Bill Sprowl, halted at the foot of the ladder and stared toward the group at the stove, his eyes very wide open and visibly accommodating themselves to the gloom of the hold, after the white, hard glare of the upper world. He was a large man, tall and broad and thick. His eyes were grey, and now they glinted hard and bright as ice. His arms were long. His chin and mouth were hidden by a crisp, light brown beard and moustache. His heavy shoulders stooped as if with a load, and his hands swung loosely at his sides, almost on a level with his knees. He advanced a step or two and again halted.

"Be ye there, Luke Cassin?" he asked.

"Sure I'm here," returned the trader. "What can I do for you?"

"Ye kin give me back my fox-skin—my black

fox—what ye coaxed away from my poor ol' dodderin' gran'mother, t'ree days ago, down to Fox River, for five pound o' tea an' one bag o' hard-bread. That bes what ye kin do fer me, ye dirty t'ief from Novy Scoty," replied the visitor.

The trader's face went from brick-red to putty-grey. His stubbly moustache fairly bristled and seemed to live away from his crooked upper lip. His close-set, black eyes gleamed like polished stones. The two fishermen of the cove exchanged apprehensive glances and left their seats by the stove like one man. They retired noiselessly and swiftly to the farther side of the counter of planks across which Mr. Cassin was in the habit of doing all his inside business. Neither the trader nor the man from Fox River gave them a glance. They were too intent on one another to notice non-essentials. The hard grey eyes and the hard black eyes met and held in a fixed and terrible regard.

"Git out," said Luke Cassin.

"Aye—wid my fox-skin," barked the other.

"You sold me the skin."

"Ye lie! I wasn't there for to sell it. Ye chated it out o' me old gran'mother. That skin bes wort' t'ree hundred dollars."

"It ain't worth what I paid for it. Git out and over the side or I'll put you out," sneered the trader, stepping back and feeling along the counter for his revolver, without turning his head. His sliding fingers did not encounter the weapon, for old Pat Whallen had moved it down to the far end of the counter. Sprowl had heard tales of that revolver and noted the trader's action.

"Ye'd be tryin' to fright me wid the little pistol, would ye?" he cried, leaping forward. Cassin met the attack with a full swing of the right hand, which sent the trapper staggering into a heavy string of boots which hung from the deck overhead. Cassin, who knew a good deal about using his fists, went to follow up his advantage, quick as a cat, and became entangled in the wreath of foot-wear. Sprowl set his legs well apart and flailed the storm-centre with those huge fists of his set at the ends of those amazing long arms. The trader, fighting wide and blind, laid hold of the top of a sea-boot and landed on the trapper's head with the heel of it. Down went Bill Sprowl on his back; but when Cassin jumped forward, he was met full and fair in the pit of the stomach by the trapper's feet and hurled against the counter.

At this point of the argument old Pat Whallen made a move. He vaulted across the counter and went up the ladder like a cat, followed close by Mike Dormer. Safe on the frosty deck he turned, sank upon all-fours, and thrust his head through the hatchway.

"Holy Saints presarve us! Sure, b'y, they bes at it again. Did ye ever hear the like? Now they bes fightin' atop the demi-johns o' rum. Blessed Saint Patrick, the waste o' prime liquor! Git after him, Bill, git after him. Bat the stuffin' out o' him, Bill Sprowl!"

"Aisy, Skipper," cautioned young Dormer. "Ye'll get him riled at ye—an' ye owes him a bill."

"Sure I owes him a bill, the t'ief!" retorted Pat, without raising his head from the black and echoing square of the hatch. "Sure I owes him a bill—an' I wants Sprowl to settle it for me. Smack him in the jaw, b'y. Bash the murderin' t'ief."

"What's the trouble now?" queried a calm, masterly voice from the schooner's shoreward rail.

Old Pat Whallen extracted his head from the jaws of the hatch, turned and scrambled to his

feet. Young Dormer also turned. They stood face to face with John Blessington.

"Sure, yer Honour, I were tryin' to stop the fight," said Pat. "The trader and Bill Sprowl o' Fox River bes fair murderin' each other down below there."

Mr. Blessington removed a pair of eye-glasses from his nose and slipped them into an inner pocket of his wolf-skin coat. Then he drew off the coat itself and handed it to Pat Whallen. He laid his walking stick on the deck and stowed his fur-lined gloves in his pocket. During all this, the shocks and bangs and half-smothered curses of the combat continued to ascend from the hold.

"Sounds as if they were breaking up the schooner," remarked John Blessington.

Then he stepped briskly forward, turned at the mouth of the hatch, found the top round of the ladder with his feet and clattered quickly down into the hold. He paused at the foot of the ladder for several seconds, accustoming his eyes to the half-gloom. Old Pat Whallen turned a horrified face to Mike Dormer.

"Sure, b'y, they'll bat the life out o' him!" he exclaimed. "I bain't hungerin' for trouble, Mike; but down I goes to try to presarve his life."

So Pat Whallen went slowly down the ladder, breathing broken prayers to all the saints he'd ever heard of and a few of his own invention. Mike Dormer followed him, with a very white face and trembling lips.

CHAPTER II

AT THE BIG HOUSE

The lantern still hung from the deck-beam, preserved in its place by good luck rather than good management. It shed its smoky and uncertain rays down upon a scene of ruin and disorder. The entire trading-compartment looked as if it had been ridden over by a regiment of dragoons. The counter of planks lay flat, with its load of cheap and gaudy fabrics, patent medicines, brass jewellry and cash-box spilled abroad. Added to this wreckage were strings of foot-gear and tin pans that had been dragged down from nails in the deck, packets of tea and tins of preserves that had been shaken down from the shelves against the bulkhead and several wicker-clad and earthenware vessels that had reposed beneath the counter. These generous vessels had been overturned and broken; and now the red rum was slopped and puddled over and through the mass of boots and provisions as if some drunken

giant had been busy trying to concoct a grotesque "trifle" or "tipsy-cake". The little stove had come in for several passing knocks. It showed a dangerous list to port and its rusty pipe had an extra elbow. And over and through this scene of ruin staggered and reeled the creators of it. The spring had gone out of their legs and the ginger out of their arms. They grappled, only to stagger and slip apart. They struck blindly, heavily, wide of the mark. They hooked at one another's eyes with fumbling, blundering fingers. Both were bleeding freely at mouth and nose. Something lay on the floor which seemed to draw the wavering senses of both. It was a small thing that gleamed in the lantern-light. Now the trader stooped as if to pick it up; but a glancing blow from the trapper's knee sent him sprawling beyond it. And now Bill Sprowl sank upon all-fours and fumbled for the thing; and a thrust in the face from the heel of Cassin's boot drove him back, cursing.

John Blessington darted into the very core of the disturbance, snatched up the revolver and dropped it into his pocket. Then he shot out his right hand and grasped the trader by the blood-soaked collar of his flannel shirt.

"Enough of this!" he exclaimed. "Are you beasts or men? Mike, grab Bill Sprowl and hold him tight."

Mike Dormer and old Pat Whallen enclosed the staggering trapper in their arms, and held him in a tender but close embrace.

"I wants my fox-skin," he muttered, blowing blood from his cut lips. "Sure, that bes all I wants. Didn't he t'ief it from me?"

Luke Cassin did not accept the interruption so peacefully. Steadied and half-supported by the grip on his collar, he stood straight and glared at Blessington through puffed and discoloured eyelids.

"Let go my shirt," he said thickly. "Drop it, you measly little dude, or I'll push yer face in."

He made a sudden jab upward; but the other turned the blow aside with his left hand.

"Don't try that again, my man, or I may lose my temper," warned Blessington calmly. Without turning his head he addressed the fishermen! "Take Bill up to the house, boys, and get Alfred Hands to help you fix him up," he said.

Without a word the fishermen turned and bundled the unprotesting trapper up the ladder.

Blessington let his hand drop from Cassin's neck, staring straight into his eyes unwaveringly.

"Damn you!" muttered Cassin. "You git to hell off my schooner!"

He made a wavering blow at Blessington's face, missed it by an inch, reeled and fell flat upon the rum-soaked merchandise. He moaned and lay still. Blessington raised his shoulders gently and dragged him under the open square of the hatch. The trader had fainted. The other examined him thoroughly.

"He has lost a lot of blood and is pretty badly beaten up," he said. "Well, I don't like the fellow—but there's nothing else for it. I must take him home, where he can be properly attended to."

John Blessington was a man of about the medium size, and fifty years old. He was strongly built, however, and in the pink of condition. He gazed down at the unconscious trader reflectively for a moment or two, then opened a door in the bulkhead forward of the hatch and entered the combined galley and forecastle. Here was another stove. A fire smouldered in it. Blessington dipped a mug of water from a bucket near the stove and with it returned to the trader. He

forced a little of the water between the swollen lips and bathed the swollen features. He brought a bottle of brandy to light next and managed to administer a strong dose of the spirit. Cassin opened his eyes. Blessington brought a linen shirt from the trader's sea-chest, tore it into strips and bandaged the other's face and head.

"That will keep the frost out till I get you home," he said.

"Guess I'll do well enough right where I be," mumbled Cassin.

"I should be glad to think so; but I cannot, in honesty," replied Mr. Blessington. "Where are your keys? I'll put out the fires and lock up."

"Keys are under my pillow, in my bunk," mumbled the trader.

Blessington found the keys and extinguished the fires in the little stoves. He lifted the trader in his arms and started up the ladder with him. The trader fainted again on the way up. The man from the Folly laid him on the deck and shut and padlocked the hatch. At that moment several of the men of the cove came over the side. They had met Whallen and Sprowl and Dormer. They looked at the bandaged and helpless trader with hostile eyes.

"What bes ye intendin' to do wid him, sir?" inquired Nick Furlong.

"We must get him up to the house," replied Blessington. "He has been badly knocked about."

The fishermen did not seem to like the suggestion.

"Sure, sir, he'll do plenty well enough in his own bunk aboard this here fore-an'-after," said Nick, "wid one o' the b'ys to tend on him. The likes o' him bain't fit to lay under yer Honour's roof, sir."

"I know nothing against him, Nick, except his close bargaining and his bad manners," replied Blessington. "He is hurt. I don't know just how seriously; but he needs the best of care for a few days. He must be taken up to 'The Folly'."

"Ye'll git no t'anks for yer charity, sir," persisted Nick. "He bes the breed what bites the hand what feeds him. Spiteful to his betters, he bes, an' hard as rock to the poor."

The trader opened his eyes and looked at Nick Furlong.

"You'll pay for this, you lobster," he said.

"Davy Breen, run and get a sledge and bring it along side, as quick as you can," ordered

Blessington. "Nick, keep your tongue quiet. The man is down now—flat on his back."

So it came about that Luke Cassin, the trader, was admitted to "The Folly". Alfred Hands, the butler, carried him from the sledge to a room in the west wing, undressed him, and put him to bed and examined his injuries as if he knew what he was about. He punched him inquiringly with his stubby fingers, here and there.

"Didn't stick to your fists, I take it—either of you," remarked Alfred Hands, with a hint of scorn in his voice. "It beats hell how you savages fight. You both deserve to die for it; but you'll both recover. Your insides are all right, I think —though it's more than you deserve, you dirty foot-fighter."

"Now look a-here. I won't take any lip from you, you danged flunkey!" retorted Mr. Cassin. "I've stood enough from your master; but I'm damned if I'll stand any cheek from you, you five-dollar-a-week-soup-server. Oh, I know your job! You clean the knives, you do—an' set the dinner-table—an' kow-tow to these cursed Blessingtons for a livin'. Call yourself a man? Well, I don't!"

"Don't get excited, or you'll do yourself a

hurt," replied Hands, calmly. "Lie quiet, an' don't pull at those bandages. I'm doctor an' nurse here, an I won't stand for any foolin'. You've been a trifle knocked about, an' Mr. Blessington has told me to fix you up."

"How's that skunk Bill Sprowl?" asked the trader.

"Kicked worse about the stomach than you, but not so bad about the face," replied the butler, crisply and meaningly.

In another room in the same wing, Bill Sprowl the trapper lay in bed. Alfred Hands attended to his hurts with a far gentler manner than he had shown to the trader; and not only did Hands serve the trapper, but Blessington himself sat beside the trapper's bed for an hour or more, renewing wet bandages and applying arnica and alcohol. He heard Bill's story of the black fox-skin.

During Luke Cassin's four-days' stay under the roof of "The Folly," he was well fed, well doctored and well nursed; but he did not catch so much as a glimpse of any member of the Blessington family. Alfred Hands fed and doctored him. Luke had to admit that the food was the best he had ever tasted. Sol Mich, an old mountaineer

Indian, nursed him under the butler's orders. Sol was a good nurse, but silent as the grave or as the bleak mountains in which he had been born. He had been in Mr. Blessington's service since before the building of "The Folly". The trader asked him many questions and received no answers. Another member of the household, a Scotch half-breed named Charlie MacElroy, sometimes visited Luke Cassin in the capacity of relief-nurse. This man was younger than Sol Mich by a lifetime and considerably more talkative. But he was no fool—though he looked something like one. Mr. Cassin questioned him persistently and cunningly about John Blessington's manner of life, business, pleasures, and past. In return he was told a number of long-winded stories, grotesque and absurd, and untrue at a glance. He offered the half-breed money for a few facts—and had to listen to more fiction.

The fight in the hold of the fore-and-after took place on a Saturday morning; and on the morning of Wednesday of the next week Mr. Luke Cassin climbed the schooner's side again, unlocked and opened the main hatch and went below. The air of the hold was unspeakably rank, lifeless, and cold as ice. The trader still limped a little on

the left leg. He lit the smoky lantern, and upon beholding the wreckage that lay around him he snarled like a husky. Then he raised his right fist above his head and vowed, with rasping breath and blistering oaths, that he would bring his enemies of Fox River and Fore-and-Aft Cove to the dust before he was through with them. He kicked the broken jugs and demi-johns crashing against the bulkheads; but at last he got a grip on his temper and set to work to straighten things and calculate damages. He lit fires in the store stove and the galley stove. He set the counter up and restored such of the fallen goods as were not ruined to their shelves and hooks. He made his calculations—and then he chuckled.

"That there black fox-skin will off-set the loss —aye, by twenty times!" he exclaimed.

He lit his pipe, mixed himself a glass of hot grog and sat down by the stove. He waited all day for trade—and he waited all day in vain.

In the meantime, Bill Sprowl sat in a big arm-chair, beside an open fire, in his room in the west wing of "Blessington's Folly". The bruises, strains, and cuts which he had received in the fight were almost well. He smoked superior tobacco in his clay pipe. He was not worrying; and he knew

that his grandmother, in the shack on Fox River, was not worrying, for Mr. Blessington had sent a man to her, with provisions and words of good cheer, on the very day of the fight. And Mr. Blessington had promised him, Bill, that he would do everything in his power to set straight the matter of the black fox-skin. Bill had great faith in Mr. Blessington's power. So he leaned back in the padded chair, smoked the superior tobacco and gazed out of the little window to the westward. It was about half-past ten when a dog-team and a man on rackets topped a snowy hummock and trailed into his field of vision. He sat up in his chair and leaned forward. It was a five-dog team—and five-dog teams were not common sights around Fore-and-Aft Cove. The sledge was long and loaded. The man wore a short coat of shaggy fur, and a fur hood drawn close about his face. His eyes were protected from the glare of sun on snow by great goggles of smoked glass. The snowshoes on his feet were long and narrow, very unlike the "pot-lids" of Newfoundland and the Labrador coast. And he came from the west—from Canada, from "up-along," from the great beyond.

"Like as not it bes a missioner," reflected Bill.

The team drew near, heading straight for "The Folly". Now Bill could see the runner's small, black moustache and the red tassels that swung from the tops of his grey overstockings. He could see the beading on the toes of the moose-hide moccasins, the tongues of the running dogs, the knots and criss-crosses of the rope that held the load upon the sledge. Then the man shouted and cracked his whip, the leader swung to the left and the whole outfit vanished from Bill's sight around the corner of the house.

A murmur of awakened activity came dully to Bill Sprowl through the thick walls of the house. He felt curious to know the business of the man and sledge from the west.

"It bes a long trail from the settlements to the west and sout'," he said. "Aye almighty long. Hundreds an' hundreds o' miles, maybe. If he bes a missioner he'll be in here a-preachin' Heaven an' Hell to me afore long; but he didn't look like a missioner. Sure, I never see five dogs to a sledge afore—an' they bes desperate fine dogs, too."

Alfred Hands entered half an hour later, with a cup of hot beef-tea for Bill. He seemed to be in an unusually happy frame of mind.

"Bes it a missioner?" asked Bill.

"What?" returned Mr. Hands.

"The man wid the dogs. I see him—an' never afore did I see such a desperate fine team o' dogs."

"Missionary nothing! That is Francis Dorian, one of our mail-runners. I was glad to see him, Bill, for I was just about out of cigarettes. He's three days ahead of time."

"Mail?" retorted Bill, in wonder. "Fore-an'-Aft Cove bain't starved wid the mails this time o' year. The gover'ment don't spend no money runnin' mails into this cove by dog-team, Mister Hands. Twice a mont' in summer-time, by coastal steamer. That bes all the mails we gets nort' o' Battle Harbour, sir."

"This is Mr. Blessington's private mail," replied Hands good-naturedly. "And a blessing it is, too—or moss would grow all over us as thick as on the barrens. Three times a month we get them regular, and every now and then a special."

"An' who owns the dogs, Mister Hands?"

"Mister Blessington owns them—and the sledges and the men."

"Saints presarve us, sir, but he must have lashin's o' money!"

"Pretty fair. He isn't a pauper, by any

means; but he used to have more. You didn't think he was down on his uppers, did you?"

"Sure, sir, I knowed he bes a great man—an' a kind one—but I comes from Fox River, sir. Would he have five hundred dollars in a year, d'ye t'ink, Mister Hands?"

Alfred Hands laughed long and loud.

"The master pays four times five hundred to me alone, though I'd serve him for nothin' and be proud to," he replied. "Five hundred, Bill! Lad, you have the darndest ideas I ever heard. He gives away more than that every year right here in this cove. It is easy to see you don't belong here."

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE BLESSINGTONS

THERE seems to be a slight mystery about the Blessingtons and their house behind Fore-and-Aft Cove, on the Labrador. In that case, now is the time for me to try to explain the mystery. No one will believe, for a moment, that people like these Blessingtons lived in Labrador for fun —people with plenty of means, knowledge of the world, education, good manners, a French cook and a butler who had been a mighty pugilist in his day; so the sooner I explain Mr. Blessington's position the better for all concerned.

In the big world John Blessington used to be known as John B. Wentworth. John Blessington Wentworth was his name. He graduated from Harvard in the year 1883, then spent a year at one of the English Universities, and another year in Germany, before joining his father in the building of railroads and the management of twenty-five thousand acres of land somewhere in

the South-West. By 1893 the paternal million of dollars had grown to five millions—honestly, steadily, for value received—and the activities of the Wentworths, father and son, had extended from the south-west into Mexico, from Mexico into South America. These men were workers and creators, not gamblers. They did big things well and earned big money. They had old-fashioned notions of honesty. They enriched themselves by thousands of dollars where other men would have pocketed millions. Some of these others, watching the operations of the Wentworths from afar, began to feel that it was a shame and a disgrace to allow so many dollars to remain in the coffers of their rightful owners. They reflected that the Wentworths did not understand their business, no matter how thoroughly they might understand the building of road-beds and bridges, the boring of mountains, the spanning of deserts, the developing of wide, wild countries, and the creation of prosperity. So three of these worthies decided to take a hand in the Wentworth enterprises, to show them how these things were done by wide-awake, up-to-date captains of industry. The names of these three progressive business men were H. P.

Blizzard, Nixon McMaster, and Simeon Quigley. Mr. Blizzard owned some small banks, some soap-boiling establishments, a string of dry-goods shops, a safety-razor factory, and a bunch of money. His climb upward from the gutter to these things had not been hampered by any such foolish trimmings as a sense of honesty, self-respect, or a liberal education. Mr. McMaster owned all sorts of things that had originally belonged to other people (usually to widows and orphans), and a perfect genius for spotting every dollar, at a glance, that did not happen to be nailed irrevocably to the mast. Mr. Quigley was a bird of much the same feather as these two, a pie of much the same kidney, a wolf of much the same fleece, a captain of industry of a very similar commission.

So these worthy gentlemen tried to insert themselves into the enterprises of old Stanley B. Wentworth and John B. Wentworth. Old Stanley B. Wentworth was wise in his generation with the wisdom of former generations. Also, he was honest; and, alas, he was proud! Yes, he was proud, with that nasty old brand of pride which caused our great-grandfathers to horsewhip certain of their enemies and call certain others

out to engage with saw-handled duelling pistols, at twenty paces, under twinkling stars or by the cold light of dawn.

"H. P. Blizzard!" cried the old man. "Nixon McMaster! Simeon Quigley! Confound their impudence! Associate with those fellows?—in business or in anything else? Not to save my right hand, Jack! Not to save my life! What's the world coming to? Damn their eyes. If we were not so far away from them just now, Jack, and so busy, I'd ask you to go north with a horse-whip and explain our opinion of such a suggestion on their miserable hides."

John was of the same mind as his father, though he expressed himself in more moderate and modern language.

Messrs. Blizzard, McMaster, and Quigley were not easily discouraged. They had not expected the Wentworths to show any unseemly haste about accepting their suggestions. That would not have been good business; and they credited even the Wentworths with enough business sense to know that. They agreed that they should have to raise their offer. So they raised it. They liked old Stanley B. Wentworth's second reply even less than his first; but they tried again.

The third reply left them nothing to guess at. Old Stanley had penned it with his own hand. Its language was almost Elizabethan—only more so. It made frank mention of such things as hell and horsewhips. It spelled *damn* just like that—with four letters and no dashes.

"It's twenty-three for us," said Mr. McMaster, who was not of a robust courage and who had confined most of his business dealings to the affairs of widows and orphans.

But Blizzard and Quigley did not agree with him. Twenty-three was not in their arithmetic at so early a stage of any problem of the kind. They exchanged glances.

"There's more to railroading than the engineering," said Blizzard. "There's more to land-developing than the land—especially when it's done in South America. I'm going after the scalps and hides of those stiff-necked Wentworths; and if you fellows don't want to stay with me, then now is your time to say so and get out. I guess I'm big enough to do my own hunting—and I guess I can handle the bag as easy as the gun. He'd cuss me out, would he—me, H. P. Blizzard? —the old stiff. His ancient hide will hang on my fence for that, if it takes me twenty years to skin

him—and Master John's beside it. I'll show them that a man don't need a Harvard and an Oxford neck-tie, and five book-fulls of *hic, hec, hocks* to do business in Wall Street and develop the industrial and natural resources of Mexico and Bolivia. I intend to explode them, see—to undermine them—to scatter them—to sand-bag them—to send them back to the farm, minus their scalps and their skins. I don't give a damn if the farm is in Normandy, or Virginia, or in New Hampshire. I don't give a damn if the old stiff's grandfather crossed the Delaware with Washington or the Alps with Cicero, I mean to go after him and get him. And there'll be more than fun in it. There will be money—big money—all sorts of money—Wentworth money and Mexican money and South American money."

"Have you any plans?" queried Mr. Quigley, and even Mr. McMaster laid down his hat again.

Years passed before the Wentworths heard again of Messrs. Blizzard, McMaster, and Quigley, and for years those worthy pirates worked in the dark. Blizzard had the brains and the daring spirit; but all three possessed the eyes of cats—the eyes that can see without the help of God's sun or the candles and electric globes of man.

In the course of time and toil the underground activities of these three began to show on the surface. The Mexican enterprises of the Wentworths began to suffer in Wall Street and in London—to suffer injuries to the reputations of the Wentworths rather than to their pockets. Of course their pockets, too, were involved to a certain degree. But in South America their enterprises were hurt right there—right on the spot—right in South America. The price of a man is not high in some of those little banana republics. Generals are cheap, too. It is said that a man who knows his way about can entertain his enemies to a revolution down there for about the same sum as his wife can entertain her friends at an evening party, farther north. Revolutions began to vex, delay, and undo the enterprises of the Wentworths.

At last (to cut a long story short) old Stanley B. Wentworth gave up the ghost, though he played the game to the last and kept his engagements to the last letter. Some say that he died of excitement, others that fever did the trick. However that may be, he expired on the scene of action, in a very hot and very unreliable country, just ten minutes after writing, sealing, and addressing

a long letter to his son John, who was living in New York at the time with his wife and children. For the past fifteen years John had given his attention exclusively to the office-end of the business and the more northern enterprises, for the old man had grown to love the hard, exciting and adventurous life of the south. A doctor cabled to John, and John went south, found the letter which his father had written just before his death, and understood something of the hidden and unscrupulous forces against which the old man had been fighting. The Wentworth enterprises were sadly crippled and the scent of one H. P. Blizzard was strong in the land. So John B. Wentworth laid his nose to that scent and gave tongue. But his hunting came to naught. Such quarry as Blizzard and his associates may be run to earth, but it is another matter to discover a law with which to dig them out. The hunting lasted for years, and the outcry of it ran abroad, sent certain stocks up and down, made several fortunes, added to others, inspired a few suicides and cleaned out Mr. John B. Wentworth. It emptied John's pocket, but it did not weaken his intention; and of course it did not touch his wife's million. Yes, his wife had a million of her

own. Now, before the dust had settled, she gave the money and some advice to her husband. They left America and retired to a quiet village in France, taking their daughter with them but leaving their two sons in the world. Thomas, the elder, spent his time between New York and South America, and William took up his abode in London. They were capable and daring young men, and they knew what they had to do. *Then John reported himself dead.* His sons, out in the big world, winked and went into mourning, and the Blizzard gang drew full breaths of relief. Then John Blessington, with his wife, his daughter, a French cook, the converted butler and the daughter's one-time nurse, went to Northern Labrador and built "The Folly". Retainers came to them. The simple people grew to love them. Lines of communication with the outside world were laid cunningly and covertly and the great work went on. The work went on, with young Thomas B. Wentworth delving quietly in America and young William B. Wentworth toiling modestly in London. Tom was supposed to be an agent of some kind, in a small way—some sort of lesser ambassador of commerce. Will, in London, seemed to be a

gentleman at large—a small gentleman not very much at large. Blizzard and his friends knew of these two surviving Wentworths, of course, and it filled them with pride and satisfaction to reflect on the decline and fall of the mighty. Blizzard even went so far as to feed his pride by offering to put a little business in Tom's way. Needless to say, Tom didn't see it. So the work went on; and now it had been going on for seven long years; and John B. Wentworth was dead—and John Blessington lived behind Fore-and-Aft Cove.

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This year Jean and her mother had spent the winter at the Folly, for the first time since settling on the Labrador. They had enjoyed the experience, for they were both good sportsmen. In Fore-an-Aft Cove one lived close to the wild ground, no matter how large and well-furnished your house, how numerous your staffs of servants. The winds of the empty barrens and the empty sea met and mingled beneath your eaves. The spirits of the waste places of land and of water haunted the rooms. Here, as nowhere else, the Blessingtons could touch the ragged, old unvarnished edges of life. Here the food of the people came direct from Nature, as simply,

and sometimes as painfully, as life itself had come to them. They took fish from the sea, in the sweat of their brows and the blood of the salt-scarred hands—the best of it to barter with the traders for clothing, hard-bread, tobacco, and tea, the poorer qualities for their own consumption. From the land behind the cove—from brown barren, black hill, and shallow river—they took toll of the shifting herds of caribou, of the red-spotted trout and silver salmon; and the wild berries which they gathered in the mellow days of autumn were often their own vegetable food in the long, snow-shrouded months of winter. In some years the harvest of fish was plentiful; in other years it was scanty, but the price paid for the "catch" was always a starvation price. In some years dozens of caribou were killed and hundreds of pounds of good meat smoked and salted and stored away for the winter; but in other years the herds failed to appear at all upon that coast. So it was with the salmon, the trout, the fat ptarmigan and the lean hares; but the summer and autumn harvest of berries never failed them entirely. Wortz, partridge-berry, "bakeapple" and marsh-berry clothed the vast and desolate barrens year after year with carpets

of vivid red, drifts of smoky blue, and patches of gold.

Sometimes these simple people made merry with much food and drink, and sometimes they starved. They gave thanks to Heaven and its Saints when the pot was full; and when the pot and the bin were empty, and Nature's bounty was covered by ice and snow or driven far afield, they prayed to the same Saints, wondering dully.

But nobody in Fore-and-Aft Cove had felt the pinch of hunger since the arrival of the Blessingtons.

The Blessingtons had warm hearts. During the long winter now so nearly over, Mrs. Blessington and Jean had learned to understand the people of the coast even as John Blessington understood them. The cove had taught them lessons that they would not have learned in the great world, among people of their own kind, in a lifetime. They loved the frank affection and respect of these sturdy, hard-handed, whimsical folk. The sense of power was sweet to them—the sense of the power to comfort the sick, to feed the hungry, to understand (and sometimes to lessen a little) the grief of the desolate. They had known power in the great cities of the world

—but never such a sense of power as here. Money stands for power everywhere—and in most places it excites envy and hostility; but here in Fore-and Aft Cove it stood for power and inspired devotion and love.

Mrs. Blessington was an attractive woman, clever, kind, and wise. Her age must have been within two or three years of that of her husband. Jean, the daughter, was twenty-one years old, long and round of limb, slender and round of hip, waist and breast, and straight as an arrow. Her plentiful, bright hair was dark brown; her brow was wide; her eyes, startlingly blue, were steady and clear. Her lips, her chin, her nose, her neck —all were adorable. The fact is, she was a beauty—a young beauty possessed, also, of all those untabulated and indescribable charms which make some girls who are not beautiful just as attractive as if they were. She was a wonder! Men have fought, and sulked, and over-toppled thrones, and taken too much wine, and burned powder, and written verses, and gone to the devil over and because of women who could not have held a candle to Jean Blessington. Her mind and heart were as attractive as her person; her spirit was as clear and steadfast as her eyes. In

short, you would have to see her to really believe her to be true. And she was a sportsman, as I have said before. She was herself, this Jean, with a mind of her own—an open and well-stored mind—and a will. Yes, she had a will of her own—and that is a good thing to have if your heart is right, if your mind is well-stored and reasonable, if your instincts are true.

CHAPTER IV

A FISHING EXPEDITION

THERE was a glow now in the April sun ; but the black ice, hard as flint, still stuck to the coast, and the ponds on the barren remained frozen and snow-muffled.

Jean Blessington breakfasted at eight o'clock. She then pulled on over-stockings and water-tight moccasins of seal-skin—"skinnywoppers"—and a short blanket coat. She was going fishing. Old Sol Mitch met her at one of the numerous doors of the sprawling house. The ancient but stalwart mountaineer carried an axe, a shovel, a three-inch auger, and a bag containing the French cook's best effort in the way of a cold luncheon. He had fishing-lines and several slices of white pork fat in his pockets.

"Good-morning, Sol Mitch," said Jean. "Isn't it a beautiful morning? I think we had better try Skiff Pond to-day."

"Mornin'," replied Sol Mitch. He wasn't much

of a conversationalist. He laid Jean's snowshoes on the crisp snow; and when she had put her feet in place he knelt and slipped her toes under the toe-straps, slipped the loops of the thongs over her heels, pulled all snug and made all fast. They stepped out briskly, rounded a corner of the house and came upon the trampled wood-yard which surrounded the kitchen door. A man sat on a block of wood beside the kitchen door, smoking in the crisp sunshine. The smoke of his pipe, and his frosted breath, went up together into the still, bright air. Jean halted at sight of him.

"Is it you, Francis Dorian? Good morning to you," she called.

The man sprang to his feet, turned and bowed low in one movement, and in another removed his fur cap from his head and his pipe from his mouth.

"Ah, you, mademoiselle! The best of weather I wish to you, mademoiselle," he replied, returning his cap to his head with a flourish and advancing with long strides.

"Ah, I see you go fish the trout, mademoiselle," he continued, reading the nature of her expedition in Sol's equipment. "I no got to work to-day. I hit the trail to-morrow. Maybe you tak me

along too, mademoiselle, for help Sol cut on the ice?"

"Certainly you may come, Francis, if you have nothing else to do," replied the girl.

Dorian bowed; and a quick, graceful gesture of his right hand seemed to proclaim to the world at large that all was well with him and that no least wish of his remained unfulfilled. He turned and sped to the kitchen, flung open the door, vanished for a moment only to reappear, still running, with his snowshoes in his hand. And behind him bulged the fat, white-capped Frenchman who reigned in that kitchen. The cook filled the doorway, shaking a fat fist.

"Oh, you Dorian!" he cried. "You savage! You cause my pies for to fall flat in the oven with the slamming of this door so sudden."

Dorian waved a hand and laughed derisively, quickly fastened his rackets to his feet, and raced after Jean and Sol Mitch. He overtook them within the half-minute.

This Francis Dorian was the man who had come in from the vast beyond to the south and west the day before—the courier from Quebec. He was a Canadian of pure, though humble, French blood. He was tall, stalwart, and swarthy. His

small, black moustaches were trimmed to needle-points. His black eyes were lively and honest, He looked a romantic figure in his red sash, beaded moccasins, and red tassels swinging from the tops of his stockings; and to-day he did not wear his coat of fur, but a "jumper" of grey blanket enlivened here and there with stripes of red and yellow. He possessed the gift of the gab, this Francis Dorian. As he strode along he told of an adventure which had befallen him on his journey. Two men had followed him. He was three days out beyond the last settlement before he became aware that any one was trailing him. The trail was good, for a tough crust covered the snow, but he slackened the pace of his dogs. The strangers overtook him. Yes, they were strangers. They were without dogs or sledge, but carried small packs on their shoulders. He mistrusted them, partly for their looks and partly for their scanty outfit. It is not a good country to cruise with only a few days' grub. So he asked them where they were bound for. They told him that they were trappers, and that their camp lay ahead, two days away, and that they had gone out to the settlements for provisions. Dorian knew that they

lied, for if what they said had been true, one of them would have remained in the woods to tend the traps, and one alone would have gone out for grub. On that crust, one man could have dragged twice as much grub on a hand-sledge as these two carried on their backs. He knew they lied; but he did not say so. He suspected that they were after him—after the mails and provisions on his sledge. What more likely? A man cannot set out into that wilderness with a loaded sledge, four times in one winter, and return each time with an empty sledge, without awaking a good deal of curiosity in the settlements. The strangers passed him. That night he made camp as usual. He dug a trench in the snow, in the lee of a bunch of thick firs, and lit a fire in one end of it. He put his sleeping-bag in the trench and stuffed it artfully with spruce branches. He fed and sheltered his dogs; then, rifle in hand, he retired into the clump of firs that overlooked his trench. The strangers appeared shortly before midnight. They crawled up to the trench with their rifles in their hands. By this time the fire in the trench had fallen low and the glow from the flameless coals did no more than stain the white walls a bloody red.

But the frosty stars were clear and bright. The strangers crawled on their bellies to that end of the trench which was farthest from the fire. They thrust their heads forward and looked down at the sleeping-bag. Then one of them—a fellow in a red woollen cap—advanced his rifle, pointed downward and fired three quick shots. The dogs awoke and began to yelp and snarl; but the sleeping-bag lay still. Then the strangers laid their rifles aside and fell to trying to hitch the dogs to the sledge. They soon discovered this to be more than they could manage; for the dogs of Francis Dorian obey no other voice and whip than the voice and whip of their master.

It was then that Francis Dorian stepped out of his retreat in the bunch of thick firs. He could not resist the impulse to laugh. The fellow in the red cap was enough to make anyone laugh. Even Sol Mitch would have laughed at the sight of that red-topped rascal on his knees. He took their rifles. Yes, and he took their provisions; but in return for their tea, bread, and bacon, he gave them five pounds of frozen fish—fish that he carried for his dogs. It was enough for them —if they walked very fast on the back trail and did not overload their stomachs.

That is the courier's adventure. He told it very well, with plenty of action—free gestures of the hands, lively shoulders, changes of voice, and flashings of his dark eyes.

"You behaved very well, Francis Dorian," remarked Jean.

The courier bowed low at that, much to Sol Mitch's disgust.

"Have you any idea who the two men could be?" she asked.

"Just two bad men, mademoiselle. We got bad men even on the woods. Half-breeds, maybe — maybe bad Injuns," replied Francis Dorian.

"Maybe Frenchman," muttered old Sol Mitch. "Plenty Frenchman in Quebec. We got no Frenchman here. Plenty bad feller in Quebec. We got no bad feller here."

Both Jean and Dorian laughed heartily at the old man's words.

It was about half-past nine when they reached Skiff Pond, a white, level expanse surrounded by the white, hummocky barrens. They trailed out upon the glistening surface, Sol Mitch in the lead. In the centre of the lake the old man halted, grunted, and removed his snowshoes.

"The best hole is over there, I think," said Jean pointing.

"Best hole right here," replied Mitch, shaking his head and setting to work at breaking the tough crust of snow with the head of his axe.

"Where you say the best place for the fish, mademoiselle?" queried Francis Dorian.

"Over there, as I remember it," she said, pointing again with her fur-clad hand. "In line with that hummock, and half-way across."

"Him no good," grunted Sol Mitch, who was now busy with the broad, sheet-iron shovel. He made the dry snow and flakes of crust fly in showers. He worked as if his very life depended upon making a hole.

"What you bet, Sol Mitch?" demanded the courier from Quebec. "What you bet we get more fish here than over yonder? What you bet you right an' mademoiselle all wrong? I tak you, Sol Mitch. Money, tobac, anything? Mademoiselle right, I bet!"

"I bet one pound baccy you get most all de fish right here," retorted Mitch, pausing in his work and turning a face toward the Frenchman that was as still and expressionless as a mask of brown wood.

"No, no, you two must not bet," cried Jean laughing. "You must not risk even a pound of tobacco on what I think, Dorian. Sol Mitch knows fifty times as much as I do about these ponds and these fish."

"Dat right," said the old mountaineer.

"I tak his bet, anyhow, mademoiselle," said the courier. "We have some sport, anyhow. Sport make the world go 'round an' 'round. Ah, mademoiselle. I live for the sport! I eat him. The sport taste better to me nor the bean an' the bacon."

"But what do you mean by sport?" asked Jean.

"Mademoiselle, I mean the gamble, the chance, the luck," replied Francis Dorian. "I call that sport, how the two fellers want to kill me, but I fool 'em. They kill me, yes, if I don't be too smart for 'em, or too lucky. But they don't kill me, an' I mak two almighty big fools of them. Yes, I call that good sport, mademoiselle. I find plenty good sport in the world—an' I keep my eyes open all the time for him."

By this time old Sol Mitch had cleared the ice for a space about seven feet in length and four feet in width. The trench he had made suggested

a huge, white grave, in which he stood hip-deep. He tossed the shovel to the Canadian and took up his axe. Dorian strode away with the shovel and set to work clearing the crust and snow from a spot on the lake's surface pointed out to him by Jean. Jean remained at the edge of Sol Mitch's trench. The old man had discarded his coat, and Jean had taken one of the lines from a pocket of it and baited it with a cube of white pork fat. She stood now and watched the old man sink his trench, full-length and full-width, into the black ice. After fifteen minutes of this she passed him down one of her long snowshoes with which to shovel out the chipped ice. By the time he had it clear he was five feet below the level of the surrounding crust. He had dug and cut through two feet of packed snow and three feet of clear ice. And still he had not reached the water. He threw his axe out of the hole then and called for the auger. Jean passed it down to him. He bored through the six inches of ice that remained, and the water welled up from the brown depths, clear and white and crystal, and lay in the blue trench of ice about one foot deep. The old man did not desert his post, but remained knee-deep in the icy bath and sank two more holes. These holes

were three inches in diameter. He scrambled out and carried the axe and the auger over to the courier. When Dorian's trench was complete, with three holes in the bottom of it and the crystal water lying in its basin of blue ice, Jean gave the word to commence fishing.

"We'll all three fish here for fifteen minutes, and then we'll go to Sol's chosen spot and fish there for the same length of time," she said. "And that's the way we'll fish until we've had enough of it."

They stood in a row above Dorian's trench, with their feet firmly set in the snowy slope, and lowered their lines through the clear water, through the holes and into the brown and secret depths.

"What's goin' to happen if one great big feller cotch holt?" queried the Canadian, squatting on his heels and letting out a little more line.

"They don't run large in this pond," said Jean. "Nice little panfish, about eight inches long and not chunky. I think the largest of them can come through a three-inch hole."

Sol Mitch blinked his eyes and lowered himself cautiously down the snowy slope until his heels found a resting place on the icy rim of the

basin. He leaned far forward, holding his line with a stiff arm.

"No fish here, anyhow," he said, and again he blinked his eyes very swiftly. "What you bet I get de first fish, Francis Dorian?"

"I bet you don't," returned Dorian quickly. "I bet you don't, one pound tobac."

"Dat good. I bet," replied the old mountaineer.

Jean looked at him—at the wooden face and stiff right arm. Her eyes rested on the brown hand that held the line. Then she smiled.

"Oh, Sol Mitch, you are no sportsman," she said.

"Me?" inquired the ancient brave, blinking his eyes again. "Me one damn good sport."

"No, you old humbug," returned the girl laughing. "I know you, Sol Mitch—and I won't allow that last bet to stand. You have a fish on your hook now, and it was there when you made the bet."

The old fellow looked exceedingly foolish, and with a sigh he began to haul in on the line, drawing it straight up through the circumscribed hole. It trembled in his hands—trembled and jerked. Then up through the hole came the fish

—a pretty snug fit—and broke away from the hook with a final desperate wriggle and darted wildly around and around the crystal basin of shadowless water. The Canadian laughed heartily at the trick, the more heartily, perhaps, that the trick had failed. But a twitch on his own line brought him back to business. Then Jean got a bite and pulled in. Both these fish were brought safely to the snow. They were nice trout, but smaller than Sol's, which continued to dart about in its crystal prison, evidently too stupid or confused to return to freedom by the hole through which it had been dragged.

The fish were more plentiful here than Mitch had expected. When time was up, nine trout lay frozen on the surface of the pond and six or seven swam in the icy basin.

"How are we to get them?" asked Jean. "They should count in the score, but they won't take the bait now. The water is too clear and they are excited."

At that moment one of the trout hung motionless for a second directly above one of the holes; then, with a twitch of his tail, he upended and vanished from sight. Another followed his example.

"Them two fellers don't count anyhow," remarked Sol Mitch.

At that Francis Dorian snatched up the wide iron shovel and jumped down, splash, into the basin of icy water. And then he began to shovel water, shouting all the while with laughter. Water and fish flew high in the air. When the last fish had been hurled aloft he uttered a shout of victory and vaulted out of his icy bath. Jean was convulsed with laughter, but old Sol Mitch looked to be anything but amused.

"You call dat fishin'?" queried the old man disdainfully. "You call him sport?—shovelin' de fishes like dat? In Quebec, maybe—oh yes; but we call him squaw-work here."

The Canadian dug his thumb into the old fellow's ribs. He seemed to be a person of unquenchable spirits and unfailing good-temper.

"Oh, you Sol Mitch, you one almighty big sport—with the little trout on the hook, all ready, an' then you mak the bet," he jeered.

They crossed to the other fishing hole, rebaited their hooks, and set to work again. This was Sol's chosen spot, and it proved to be a good one. In ten minutes, twenty fine trout lay frozen stiff on the snow and a dozen swam in the shallow

basin. Sol grinned, puffed hard on his pipe and fished with all his might. The laughter of Jean and the Canadian courier rang abroad on the clear air. It was as quaint and merry a party as one could find—and as childlike. . . . And suddenly a voice broke in upon their fun. All three turned and beheld Luke Cassin, the trader, standing about six paces behind them, with a grin on his lips and a sneer in his eyes.

"Havin' a rare lark, I guèss," he said, looking at Jean Blessington.

CHAPTER V

LUKE CASSIN INTRUDES

Jean stared at Luke Cassin. She had never before had so close a view of him. She liked neither his face, his voice, nor his manner; and she had heard a great deal about him from the fisher-folk that was unfavourable. There was something about the man — something deeper and more serious than the sneer in his eyes and the jeer in his words—that froze her mirth and hardened her heart.

"Thank you. We have had very good sport," she said, and returned to her fishing.

Old Sol Mitch grunted and rebaited his hook. Francis Dorian turned his dark eyes slowly from Jean's averted face to Luke Cassin. Then he advanced upon the trader and halted close in front of him. He smiled easily and stroked his trim moustache.

"You goin' to fish, maybe?" he queried politely.

"No, I ain't," replied the trader. Then, "But now that I'm here I guess I will try my luck. Lend me the loan of yer line, will you?"

Dorian shook his head. "I think you best go 'way," he said, "for it tak you one helluf a long time to dig a hole."

"Guess I'll fish right here. Guess I got as good a right as you," retorted Luke Cassin. "Here, you, loan me a hook an' line."

The man from Quebec sighed profoundly. "I guess you better guess all over again," he said. "You guess too almighty quick."

"Now look'e here!" exclaimed Cassin, "who the hell d'you take yerself for, anyhow?"

"Me?" returned the courier, with lifted eyebrows. "Francis Dorian out of Canada, me. Servant to Monsieur Blessington—an' good one, too."

"Servant?" queried the trader, with a world of unpleasantness in his tone. "Servant to the old man, hey? Well, I wouldn't think it, Mr. Francis Dorian—not from the way you an' the young lady was carryin' on just now. I took you to be the young lady's gentleman friend."

At that the Canadian's smile became a wolfish grin, and the merry gleam in his black eyes be-

came an icy glitter. A tremor passed through him, from the soles of his moccasins to the top of his cap. Miss Blessington turned quickly, as if she had felt something of the same shock. Her blue eyes were now as dark as the sea and her face was pale with anger; but her voice was steady and low.

"Don't touch him," she said. "He has just recovered from a beating given him by Bill Sprowl, of Fox River—for cheating. He is in no shape to defend himself, Dorian. Alfred Hands would not let him out of bed until a few days ago."

Dorian turned and lifted his cap.

"I hear you, mademoiselle," he said. "I take my order—like a good soldier." He turned again to the glaring, sneering trader. "Go 'way," he said. "Go 'way an' get strong. I beat you up some other day—for that dirtiness in your eye, that dirtiness in your tongue. But go 'way now, or maybe I forget the order an' command of mademoiselle."

Luke Cassin laughed harshly, but the sound was not convincing. Also, the sneer and glare of lips and eyes had lost something of their force. But he swaggered and laughed. Then old Sol

Mitch suddenly let his line slip from his hands. He sprang around on his bowed legs. His eyelids flickered like lightning and his face no longer resembled a wooden mask. He whipped a knife from his belt.

"Too damn much talk," he cried, and darted toward the trader.

Luke Cassin held his ground for a second, then turned and ran. The old mountaineer followed him for fifty yards or so, then turned and came shambling back to the two at the trench, his face an unvexed mask again but his eyelids still flickering. As he came, he returned the knife to its sheath. Upon reaching the trench he stooped and recovered his line. He glanced at Jean, then swiftly at the courier.

"Too damn much talk," he said. "Talk don't scare feller like dat."

"I've had enough of it," said Jean, half an hour later. The trader, with his ugly face and ugly sneers, had spoiled the flavour of the day—had driven all the innocent fun out of the expedition. They built a fire on the edge of the pond, ate their lunch, then set out for home. The men were loaded down with frozen trout.

Jean found her father and mother in the library.

She told them of the fishing, of the wagers between Sol Mitch and Francis Dorian, of the fun—and then of the unpleasant interruption by Luke Cassin.

"Confound that fellow," exclaimed Mr. Blessington. "He has a mean and envious nature—and no sense of gratitude or honesty. He will make trouble for us if he can. Pat Whallen tells me that the fellow is furious because we have paid him so little attention during the winter. It seems that he considers himself to be vastly superior in every way to these poor livyers."

"Hands is afraid that he will try to make trouble for us when he leaves here in the spring," said Mrs. Blessington. "I suppose he could easily excite the curiosity of the newspaper reporters. It would be very awkward, Jack. Anything about this place in the papers would upset all your plans."

"Give me three more years of this," replied Blessington, "and I shall not care who knows that I am alive. The whole world will know that I am alive; and those misguided people in South America will be saved from their enemies and mine; and my name, and my father's memory, will be held in honour. The work is

going ahead without any serious hitch, slowly but surely. In three years—perhaps in two—it will be known that I am not only alive, but victorious; that all my father's work was successful; and that an honourable reputation still means more than wealth to the Wentworths."

"But if your enemies should learn the truth?—the truth about you and about the work that Tom and Will are doing?" queried the lady. "The newspapers, if they are given a hint, can ferret out anything under the sun, in three years—or even in two."

"The game would be up," replied her husband. "My enemies would be secure in their stolen possessions, and I would be a laughing stock before the world. Viewed by the light of failure, the pretended death and secret venture of mine would look decidedly ridiculous."

"Then I agree with Hands," returned Mrs. Blessington.

"That we should prevent this fellow Cassin from taking his story out of Fore-and-Aft Cove?"

"Yes."

"That would leave a bad blot on our record as sportsmen. It would not be playing the

game. It would have to be explained sooner or later—and might prove very awkward."

"He has no family. When we are ready to let him go we can pay him for his time; or better still, we can employ him here during the two or three years."

"Even if he should agree to remain here and take wages from me, I would not trust him. But I'll think it over. We are safe until the ice breaks, anyway. I shall have to call on him in a day or so about Bill Sprowl's black fox."

On the following morning Francis Dorian fed his dogs by the first pale shadow of dawn. Then he ate his own breakfast, in the wide kitchen of the Folly, by lamp light. Other servants and retainers of the house breakfasted at the same time—all the others, in fact, save the ladies' English maid, Mr. Hands, and M. Benoist, the head cook. It was a cheerful and abundant meal, wtih the assistant cook in charge. Francis Dorian was the hero of the occasion, of course, for was he not about to depart for Quebec—for the great beyond. None of the others had seen the settlements of Quebec. Even Sol Mitch had never been farther west or south than his native mountains, the blue and purple loom of

which could be seen from "The Folly" on a clear day. One of the wood-cutters, a native of the cove, had once made a voyage to Harbour Grace, in Newfoundland, with a freight of fish. His father had owned a little fore-and-after, but that was many years ago. Charlie MacElroy, the Scotch 'breed, had trapped to the north and west, but had never seen any larger settlements of men than those at Spotted Islands and Battle Harbour. All the others at table, including the assistant cook, had been born, and had spent all their years, on the Labrador. So Francis Dorian looked like a hero and a man of the world to them, and he was permitted to talk to his heart's content. He was a fine talker. He not only told and retold the story of his adventures on the way in, and many past adventures by flood, field, and settlement, but he outlined his course of action should any adventures happen to turn up during his trip back to the fringe of civilization from which he had come. He showed them his rifle and his revolver. Eyes gleamed with admiration—especially the eyes of Mary Whallen, the granddaughter of old Pat Whallen.

Mr. Hands appeared just before the conclusion of the meal. He carried a stout leather bag,

locked and sealed, in one hand and a long, sealed and addressed envelope in the other. After exchanging greetings with the company at large and in general, he called Francis Dorian from the table.

"Mr. Blessington thinks that you had better give the post office at Two Rivers the go-by, this time," he said. "Where is the next office?"

"Lac du Bois," replied Dorian. "One day nearer Quebec city."

"On the railway?"

"On the rails, yes; an' one darn good post-master too. He my own father's brother's son."

"Well, you take this mail bag to him, watch him stamp every letter and pay him for the stamps. Then you get on the train and take this letter right into the city of Quebec, and mail it at the post office there. In the meantime, keep it next your skin. This letter is very important—more important than all the letters in that bag put together; though they are important too, of course. If any more smart guys try to hold you up, or ambush you, don't let them get that letter, whatever happens."

"That's a'right," said Dorian. "The bag to

my cousin on Lac du Bois an' this letter to the post office on the city. A'right. It happen jes' lak that, or Francis Dorian one dead man on the trail."

"Good. Then you go home and wait until another mail bag is brought to you. Then you bring it in, by sledge, by canoe, or whatever way you think best. Here is money for expenses and three months' pay. And Mr. Blessington wants you to take a man out with you and bring him back with you—for it looks as if the trail is growing dangerous. Two are better than one when there are murderers in the woods. You can sleep and watch turn and turn about. Charlie MacElroy is the man."

"That's a'right," said Dorian. "Charlie pretty good man, I guess."

Charlie was delighted when he was told that he was to make the trip with the Canadian. Hands talked to him very seriously for ten minutes. Then he gave him a rifle and a revolver.

"But don't forget that Dorian is in command," he concluded.

The sun was up when the five big dogs pulled the sledge out of the yard and set off on the long

trail, the first stage of which ran due west. The crust on the snow was firm. Francis and Charlie ran beside the dogs, their shadows sliding out in front of them, and the smoke of their pipes drifting back across their shoulders and fading in the clear air. Mr. Blessington and Jean waved them "God speed" from the front porch, and the assistant cook led the retainers in a ragged cheer. Dorian turned and waved his fur cap.

"A'right, Monsieur. A'right, mademoiselle," he shouted.

The big, black leader of the team yelped a command and threw himself against the breast-plate with all the weight of his body, head down, claws scarring the tough crust. The others followed his example, the sledge gathered speed, and away they all went on the run.

Francis Dorian changed the course to the south-west shortly before noon. They followed a trail that was marked here and there by signs of encampments—axe-cuts on the trees, an empty package that had contained tea, half-filled trenches in sheltered places and the grey ashes of dead fires under the drift. Even one unskilled in woodcraft could follow that trail in clear weather.

Francis and Charlie got along well together,

for though both were great talkers they were also good listeners. They made splendid progress along that crusted trail. When they went into camp on the third night, the sky was dull and Dorian predicted snow before morning. In this country the month of April is often a time of heavy snow-fall. A slow steady wind began to moan in from the east. They fed the dogs with frozen fish, lit a fire, built a shelter of saplings and wide spruce boughs (for it was not cold enough to sleep in a trench), and cooked their supper. They ate an astonishing quantity of bread, bacon, and flap-jacks and drank two pot-fulls of tea. Then they lit their pipes and began to swap yarns. They told some amazing stories that have nothing to do with this one, but by nine o'clock they were talked out for the time being. The moaning wind had weakened to no more than a fitful flap of air. The sky was black. A few flakes of snow came circling out of the void only to shine for an instant in the red light and vanish. Charlie yawned, took up his axe and stepped into the brush to drag a few more logs to the fire. Francis Dorian unrolled the sleeping-bags, aired them at the fire and spread them on the spruce-bedded floor of the

shelter. The snow began to spin down now, slow but thick. The Canadian crouched by the fire and knocked the ashes from his pipe. The half-breed's axe *chunked* once as he drove the narrow blade into the end of a small log of birch, preparatory to drawing it out to the fire. One of the dogs snarled. Then somebody stepped from the thicket and stood close to the fire, staring down at the Canadian.

"Lay it there," said Dorian, without looking up. "Best drag out all that's cut. Goin' to be a darn dirty night, I guess."

"I think you are right," said the other.

Dorian, crouched double though he was, sprang back from the fire as quick as thought. His arm leapt up, with the revolver shining dully in his fist.

"Don't shoot," said the stranger, laughing quietly. "Not guilty. I did not know everyone went heeled in this country. If I had I wouldn't have dropped in on you so suddenly."

"Who are you?" asked Dorian, without lowering his hand.

"John Jones," replied the stranger. "I'm new to this country; but I seem to be getting along pretty well—unless you twitch your finger."

Dorian lowered his arm and stepped forward, staring keenly at the other; and at that moment Charlie MacElroy came puffing out of the thicket, dragging the back-log of birch at his heels. At sight of an *extra* figure by the fire he uttered a gasp of dismay, and for a moment stood helpless staring and quaking. But only for a moment. Then, wrenching the axe from the log, he swung it up and back.

"Quit it!" cried Dorian. "This feller a'right, Charlie."

John Jones turned and nodded smilingly at the 'breed, then calmly lowered his heavy pack from his shoulders to the snow.

"Any objections if I camp right here for the night?" he queried, addressing the Canadian.

"That's as maybe," returned Dorian cautiously. He flung some dry branches on to the fire and the flames shot up. His black eyes glanced from Jones all around the red, gloom-walled circle of fire-light. His revolver gleamed at his side. "That's as maybe," he repeated. "Ye see, John, him an' me don't feel just easy, this trip. We got our eye open. I never see that face on you afore, John. It look lak queer face for this country, to me."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the stranger.

"Some bad fellers on these woods now," replied the Canadian.

"Do you happen to be the man they're after?"

"Who after?"

"The fellows who've been trailing me for the last two days and all last night? One of them wears a red cap. I gained on them last night; but I don't think they are more than three or four hours behind me, even now. They were anxious to waylay a man called Francis Dorian—until they got on my trail."

"Sit down," said the Canadian. "Now, what's yer name?—and what you want on this country?"

"I told you my name. I came into this country to—well, to trap," replied the stranger.

"I ask yer true name," said Dorian. I tell you mine. Me Francis Dorian. I don't feel ashame for that name."

"But I do feel ashamed of my name," replied the stranger. "It is John Blizzard."

CHAPTER VI

A FIGHT IN THE DARK

The stranger's statement meant nothing to Francis Dorian or to Charlie MacElroy. Blizzard? They had never heard the name before. Francis shook his head.

"You don't look like trapper, nor you don't look like you belong on this country," he said. "More like sport—the kind we get on to the Quebec woods, along in October, from the States. Yes, more like sport nor trapper. Anyhow, you don't look like you wanted to kill a feller an' thief his outfit."

"Kill a fellow? Bless my soul, no!" exclaimed Blizzard.

"You got a pretty good face on you," continued the Canadian. "You look pretty honest. I guess you don't lie—very much."

"I am glad I look honest," replied the stranger, with a grim smile. "It is my own fault if I do. As you say, I don't lie—very much."

"'Cept about the trappin'. I see you lie about that."

"Honestly, I'm a trapper. At least, I'm trying to be one. I have not bought my outfit yet, nor decided on a trapping-country. I want to be a long way off from anywhere—and I should like to go into partnership with some one who knows the business. I want to make an honest living—in the woods—by the sweat of my brow."

Francis Dorian eyed him keenly by the strong light of the replenished fire.

"Maybe you look for some one?" he queried.

"No, I'm not looking for anybody," replied Blizzard.

"So help me God?"

"If you like. So help me God I'm not looking for anybody."

"Then why you call yerself John Jones?"

"It's the name I want to use. It's the name I want people to know me by. I'm sick of my own name. I want to forget it."

"Hidin' from the police, maybe?"

"From the police? Bless my soul, no!" replied the stranger. "I have done nothing that the police could possibly want me for. Fact is, I've done nothing at all—good or bad—nothing

good and nothing very bad. I'm sick of things, that's all. I can't explain it to you. Now tell me. What do you mean to do about these fellows who are on my track? They are looking for you."

"Well, John, I guess we wait right here for 'em," replied the Canadian. "I fool them once, on the way in; an' now I fool them again—stiff, this time. They try to kill me las' time. This time I guess I better kill them. What you think, Charlie?"

The so-called John Jones gazed in astonished horror from the big French-Canadian to the Scotch 'breed.

"Kill them," he exclaimed. "I thought this was a law-abiding country—even in its wildest and most desolate parts. That's what I've read about it—and a lot about your Royal North-West Mounted Police that track a murderer down, and bring him in, if it takes five years to do it. Can't you manage these fellows without killing them?"

"I guess you best kill 'em, Francis," said Charlie reflectively.

The courier smiled pleasantly at the stranger.

"Yes," he said. "Canada one damn good

country ; but sometime a feller got to fight for his life—an' when that happens some feller might get killed. Yes, the police mighty good fellers—but not God. Those men foller me in from the settlements an' shoot at my sleepin'-bag ; but I wasn't in the bag. Well, I take the rifles an' the grub away an' let them go. They want to kill me an' rob my mail-bag. I never see them afore, in Quebec, nor on the woods, nor anywheres. Strangers, them fellers. Now they come to kill me again—an' rob me ; an' they think you hear too much so they try to get you, too. Well, I don't like that. I don't like to be killed—but I sooner be killed nor robbed ; so we just wait in the bushes an' shoot them when they come to the camp. Then we leave them lay—an' monsieur the wolverine, an' the fox do the rest. Well, them fellers don't belong on this country. They come here to kill and rob—so they don't tell the police. Nobody look for them. Well, how you think the police know anything about it ? "

" It would be murder, though I have no doubt they deserve to be shot," answered John Jones. " Capture them and take them back to the settlements with you, and hand them over to the police."

"Hell, we got somethin' else to do," exclaimed Dorian. "We got to travel quick—an' safe. We got big business—an' just enough grub for Charlie an' me."

"You carry mails for the Hudson Bay Company, I suppose?" said John.

"Yes," said Dorian, shooting a warning glance at Charlie MacElroy.

"Where is your nearest post?" asked the would-be trapper.

"Bout two-three hundred mile, I guess," replied the courier.

"That's where you've come from, I suppose. If you can capture these two ruffians it is your duty to hand them over to the authorities. Where is the nearest settlement? Isn't there something within two hundred miles? If there is, I'll look after these fellows for you."

A light of suspicion, quickly veiled, glinted for an instant in the Canadian's black eyes. Charlie MacElroy shifted uneasily on his moccasined feet. John Jones began to fill his pipe with the utmost composure. To do so he removed his fur mittens. His hands were white and shapely, though large. The nails gleamed in the fire-light, broad, pink, faultless. They were not the hands

of a trapper. Dorian glanced at them, and his eyes narrowed.

"You seem mighty anxious them fellers don't get killed," said he.

"Yes, because I think it unwise to kill people —even one's enemies," replied John. "I should be sorry to see you get into trouble."

"You come on to this country mighty late in the season for trappin'," said the Canadian. "Why don't you come here in October—with outfit?"

"That's a question that does credit to your intelligence," replied John good-naturedly. "But surely you can see for yourself that I am not yet a trapper of experience? I'm not yet a trapper, nor even a fair woodsman. I did not come into these woods in October because at that time I was living in comfort, and in blissful ignorance of the source of my comforts, in the city of New York. Now I am here. It has cost me some money and a great deal of time to get here—and as I have just exactly five hundred dollars left I must learn to do something for a living. I've always heard and read that the thing to do in a country like this is to trap. That's why I call myself a trapper."

"I think maybe you a partner to them fellers that try to kill me," said Francis Dorian. "It look kinder like that, anyhow."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the stranger. "Why, man, I never set eyes on them before this trip—and they're after me as well as you. Do I look as bad a ticket as all that? Here, take my rifle—and keep it for me until morning. I haven't any revolver. I hope you'll soon change your opinion of me for the better."

Dorian took the rifle without a word. He handed it to Charlie.

"Now I guess we best make another camp an' wait for the robbers," he said. "You sit right there, John, an' smoke your pipe."

They made another shelter about twenty yards from the fire; but they did not make another fire. They piled on more wood and then retired to their new shelter, taking the stranger with them. The snow was still spinning down from the black sky. They slipped into their sleeping-bags and lay down under the frail shelter of boughs, with their arms free, their faces toward the fire and their weapons close at hand. John Jones lay between them, unarmed. An hour passed, and suddenly the snow ceased

to fall. A little wind sprang up and spilled the light masses of snow from the overloaded branches of the spruces. The sound of it dropping to the snowy ground was like thousands of padded foot-falls advancing and retiring through the black forest. It was over in a few minutes; the little wind passed on and silence lay again upon the wilderness. Another hour dragged away, and then one of the dogs began to growl. Charlie MacElroy stirred a little at that and slowly skinned the blanket case from his rifle. Dorian did the same, then removed the mitten from his right hand and breathed softly on the tips of his fingers. The dog ceased its growling. Silence reigned again, broken only by the snapping and sizzling of the birch logs in the fire. It must have been ten minutes later that the watchers saw something low and black at the far edge of the circle of fire-light. It moved stealthily, then vanished back into the wall of darkness. Was it a dog?—or a human on all fours? A human by the bulk and shape of it. Again the thing appeared, farther to the left and still upon the very edge of the circle of illumination. It crouched there motionless for fully half a minute, and then it was joined by another

crawling shape. They were men, not dogs—for dogs do not carry things in their paws that flash in the fire-light. Together, side by side, the two shapes crawled slowly and noiselessly into the low entrance of the deserted shelter.

"They think they use the knife this time, for better luck," whispered the courier. "Now, Charlie, let 'em have it."

The two repeaters opened fire, spurting flame into the night and nickel-coated bullets through the bushy sides of the little camp.

"Fire low! Fire lower!" exclaimed John Jones excitedly. "Hell, Charlie, you're away up in the air."

The dogs began to yelp and snarl and whine.

"I guess we got them," said Dorian, opening the magazine of his rifle to reload . . . and no sooner had he said it than two spikes of flame darted out of the darkness behind the shelter and something hummed low over their heads. Again the rifles of the enemy cracked—and again—and yet again. Charlie, trying to feed his magazine, dropped his cartridges in the snow because of the trembling of his hand. Even Dorian managed to drop one cartridge in the excitement. For half a minute the hidden ruffians had the

firing all to themselves, and Dorian and Charlie MacElroy paid no attention to anything but the the magazines of their rifles. The doubtful Mr. John Jones was forgotten, until the would-be murderers suddenly let fly again and were answered on the quarter-second by a perfect ripple of shots from a point in the blackness halfway between the two positions. Then Dorian, glancing over his shoulder, saw that the stranger and his rifle had taken their departure. He crawled from his sleeping-bag, kicked it clear of his feet and lay flat. He was ready now, with five shots waiting at the crook of his finger, all ready to rip off at a sound or a flash. The half-breed was also prepared to take a hand in the shooting again.

"I guess that feller John fired at the other fellers," whispered Dorian into his companion's ear.

A single shot rang out from John's position. Silence followed. The dogs were evidently too frightened or bewildered to do so much as yelp.

"Lay low," whispered Dorian. "I guess this feller John know's what he's doin'."

Five minutes passed, and again the rifle of the stranger spoke from the same point in the outer

dark. This time it drew an answer—one shot in answer. To this rattled four shots in return, quick as an echo. Silence settled down again, and a log broke in the fire, sending up a shower of sparks; then the fire subsided, drawing close its circle of red light. The Canadian and the 'breed lay very still, straining their eyes and their ears against the dark and the silence. The minutes passed. Charlie MacElroy moved uneasily, wriggling his long, slim body closer to Dorian.

"What you think?" he whispered, none too steadily.

"Maybe them fellers are dead—an' maybe they play dead," replied Dorian. "Hark. What's that? Saints in heaven, what's that noise?"

"Sounds like a huskie—like a dog sniffin'," replied Charlie brokenly, as if his voice was not strong enough to get quite clear of his tongue.

Dorian raised himself to his knees and turned to the right, with his rifle at his shoulder.

"Stop there. I got you covered," he cautioned.

"Don't shoot—for God's sake. It's John. I'm hit," came the faint reply from close at hand.

"Did you kill them fellers, John?" asked the Canadian.

"Keep quiet. . . . I don't know. . . . Lend me a hand," came the broken reply.

Dorian crawled forward and soon met John. Together they made their way slowly back to the shelter. Jones said that he was wounded in the left shoulder; and Dorian felt the shoulder and brought his hand away wet and sticky with blood. Dorian bound the shoulder roughly but firmly, working in the dark and using the blanket case of his own rifle for a bandage. Then he stowed the sufferer away in a sleeping-bag and administered a stiff dose of brandy.

"Fix him better when we know where we're at," he whispered.

John slept, weak with loss of blood and soothed by the brandy; but the others lay wide awake, watching and listening, until dawn. The unseen enemy made no move. In the first grey pallor of morning, Dorian and MacElroy left the shelter and went out cautiously to investigate. The air was motionless. A thin plume of smoke went straight up from the shrunken fire. Two of the dogs lay close to the long mound of ashes and veiled coals. Two others wandered restlessly about the little camp, growling deep in their throats, with their stiff manes ruffed on their

shoulders. Suddenly a long-drawn, dismal howl went up from the heart of a nearby thicket.

It was there among the crowded spruces that they found the body of one of their enemies. The dog sat on his haunches several yards away, snout in air, saluting death with a cry that seemed to voice the very spirit of desolation. At sight of its master, however, the dog ceased its howling, got on its four feet, wagged its tail, and trotted back to the camp. But the fellow in the red woollen cap did not move. He lay on his back, staring upward with wide-fixed, blank eyes. His left temple, and all the left side of his face, were redder than his woollen cap—caked and smeared with the red of frozen and congealed blood. One of John's bullets had gone clean through his skull, in just above the left temple and out behind the right ear. But it was evident, at a glance, that the fellow did not lie as he had fallen. When a crouching man is shot through the head, he does not fall flat on his back, with straight legs and straight arms.

"Wish John had shot 'em both," said Francis Dorian. "Other feller's gone through this feller's pockets an' got away. Even took the ring off his finger, by hell! Yes, this feller

have one darn fine ring when I see him last time."

Yes, a broad white band on one of the dead man's thick, weather-stained fingers showed where the ring had been; and both outer and inner coat had been yanked open at the breast and the pockets turned inside out. The belt was gone from the thick waist. The rifle that had peppered the darkness so ineffectively had been taken away. The dead man had been robbed even of his fur mittens.

"You hunt 'round, Charlie, an' find that feller's tracks. I guess we better go after him," said Dorian.

Dorian went back to the shelter, where John Jones still slumbered heavily, built a roaring fire, hung the tea-kettle over a corner of it and got out provisions and a frying-pan. Then he awakened the stranger and examined the wounded shoulder. He cut away coats and shirts at the shoulder, washed the wound clean and bandaged it with strips torn from a clean cotton shirt in his own outfit. The bullet had gone clean through the thick of the shoulder muscle, evidently without touching the bone.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGER TAKES UP HIS ABODE WITH TWO MINK SAM

Charlie MacElroy appeared.

"I find his track," he said. "He start right back on his back trail."

The Canadian's only answer was a reflective nod. The three ate breakfast, drinking many mugs of tea, and the dogs were fed with frozen fish. More wood was brought for the fire. The leather mail-bag was placed beside John, and both the stranger and Charlie were told to keep their eyes on the bag and their rifles in their hands.

"I go after that feller," said the Canadian. "I come back afore sundown."

He hesitated for a moment, thinking hard; then he produced the long envelope from his breast and handed it to the Scotch half-breed.

"You best keep it till I come back," he said. "Maybe that feller shoot first. Anyhow, you

look after the letter, Charlie—an' hold on to it even if the devil himself come after it."

Francis Dorian returned shortly before sundown, even as he had promised.

"No good," he said. "That feller travel too darn fast—an' keep straight on the trail. I guess he got pretty good scare. No danger from him."

After supper the three men talked over their plans. Dorian's suspicions of the stranger had given way to feelings of friendliness, gratitude, and absolute trust. John Jones's behaviour during the disturbance of the night before had left nothing to be desired. In fact, the successful termination of the engagement had been due solely to John's effective tactics and straight shooting.

"You still want to stay on this country?" asked Dorian. "You best travel back to Quebec with us, John. If you want to trap nex' fall, well, you find plenty darn good trappin' country closer to the settlements nor this."

"I don't want to go back to Quebec, and the farther I am from the settlements the better I like it," replied John. "No, I'll not go back with you, though it is very kind of you to offer to take me. I want to stay here. I can put in the sum-

mer fishing and exploring, and commence trapping next winter."

"You got no outfit. How do you stay on this country without grub?"

"I have money. I can buy an outfit at the nearest H.B.C. post, or if that is too far away, I'll work out to the coast. There are some settlements on the Labrador coast, I think—fishing villages."

"Darn few, John. The Labrador is one damn desolate country. Anyhow, you can't tote yer pack now—not one mile."

"I can get along somehow," replied John.

Dorian smoked his pipe in silence for several minutes.

"Charlie," he said, at last, "you got to go back with John. You take him to one good trapping-ground, where some one live that you know—some half-breed or Injun. Maybe up Fox River is pretty good place. Then you go home an' tell the skipper how I go right on to Quebec, an' how we get the hump on them fellers that try to kill us; an' maybe I take you to Quebec with me next trip, if you want to go."

"A'right," said Charlie.

"That's not right at all," protested John.

"Why should you two upset all your plans because of me. My shoulder will be all right in a couple of days—and I have grub enough to last me to the coast."

But he might just as well have voiced his protests and objections to the trees.

Early next morning Francis Dorian continued his interrupted journey toward the distant settlements to the south and west. Charlie and John remained in camp for another day and night. Charlie spent a couple of hours in dragging the frozen body of the dead man far aside from the trail. The foxes had already found it. He buried it in a snow-drift, where, doubtless, the foxes would soon find it again. He left it to the care of the wilderness with an easy conscience. The ruffian in the red woollen cap had deserved his dismal fate; and there was not one chance in a thousand that his bones would ever be discovered or the manner of his death made known to the world. Let it go at that.

They set out on the back trail shortly after dawn. MacElroy carried a double pack and John walked with his arm in a gun-case sling. They travelled slowly and rested often. John had been warned by the Canadian not to over-

heat himself; and so, though the "going" was good, fifteen miles brought them to the night's fire and camp. On the second day they did better by two or three miles; and on the third they were afoot from dawn to sunset, with a break of only an hour at noon. On the morning of the fourth day Charlie studied his surroundings and his battered pocket-compass. They were now within half a day's journey of Fore-and-Aft Cove; but the Scotch breed had no intention of taking John to the cove. Such a thing would be dead against Mr. Blessington's orders, and Mr. Blessington's orders were never questioned by his servants or retainers. "The Folly" was free as air to men from the hills and men from the coast; but it was more than any man's job was worth to bring any one from "up-along" to within thirty miles of Mr. Blessington. Francis Dorian had said Fox River. Charlie knew a man on Fox River—an old mountaineer named Two Mink Sam. This old man would be glad of a partner with five hundred dollars Good. So they left the trail that led to Fore-and-Aft Cove and swung to the west a point or two. They struck the valley of Fox River before night. Next day they followed it down,

and that night they ate supper with Two Mink Sam.

Two Mink Sam was glad of the visit. He was almost out of tobacco and he was growing very old. How old? He could not say exactly. He remembered many ancient things that he had seen with his own eyes, and many ancient things that had been told to him—and he sometimes confused the things he had seen with the things his grandfather had told to him.

"Sol Mitch plenty old. Oh, yes. Me spank Sol Mitch one day, when Sol Mitch plenty little pappoose no bigger nor one grilse," said the aged trapper.

He approved of John's tobacco.

"Me see one man all winter, just one time," he said. "Bill Sprowl, he come up river one day. He smoke darn bad baccy."

Full of good bacon, good tea, and good smoke, the old mountaineer could see no reason why John Jones should not share his shack, his traps and his trapping country.

"But where shall I get my supplies?" asked John of Charlie.

Charlie drew him a map in the ashes of the hearth.

"You go down river 'bout five mile," he said. "Big bend in river here an' big, high brow on right side. You take left bank an' walk due east—and you come to coast in 'bout ten mile. Then you travel nort' along landwash an' pretty soon you come to one settlement called Black Island Tickle. Mighty good place. You find one Moravian missioner, one store, an' six-seven houses. You trade there a'right."

John made notes of this information, and a copy of the map, on the back of a letter.

"And where are you bound for?" he asked.

Charlie MacElroy replied that he had to go south.

So it happened that the man from up-along, who called himself John Jones, took up his abode with old Two Mink Sam. Charlie went away early in the morning. He set his course straight down the valley of the river. Three hours of steady tramping brought him to the ice-bound coast. He passed the Sprowls' shack without halting. He took to the sea-ice, which was level as a table, and followed it southward along the desolate coast. The sun was behind the hills when he rounded the Skipper's Rock and entered the little haven of Fore-and-Aft Cove. During

all those hours, along all those miles, he had not set eyes on a human being or a living beast. He went straight to "The Folly".

The family listened to Charlie MacElroy's story with the closest attention. Jean's eyes flashed at his disjointed but graphic description of the fight in the dark.

"So you killed one of them," said Mr. Blessington, when Charlie had finished his report.

"Not me," said Charlie. "John, he pot him. Anyhow, we don't hear nothin' 'bout that."

"And John is on Fox River?"

"Yes, he stop now with Two Mink Sam. John one darn fine feller; but I think maybe you don't want him here. Guess he run away from somethin'; but he say he don't run from police."

"And his name is John Jones? And he is a good fellow?"

Charlie nodded. The stranger's mention of another name—of a name of which he was ashamed—had gone clean out of his mind.

"You have done very well, Charlie," said Mr. Blessington. "Go to your dinner now; and when you tell your story in the kitchen, don't say anything about the dead man. That fellow

deserved all that he got, but too much talk about him might get your friend John into trouble."

Mr. Blessington talked the matter over with his wife and daughter, and later, with Alfred Hands. It was decided that Hands should pay a visit to Two Mink Sam, in the near future, and see what he could make of this stranger, John Jones. Hands was pleased with the idea.

"I'll pass myself off as a missionary, sir," he said. "I'll soon find out whether he's dangerous or harmless, intentional or only accidental, sir."

While Francis Dorian and Charlie had been facing and outwitting the perils of the trail, Mr. Blessington had enjoyed a little trouble of his own at home. He had called on Luke Cassin, aboard the schooner, to set right the matter of the black fox for Bill Sprowl. He had tried to show Mr. Cassin the error of his ways; and the bold skipper had spat derisively against the front of the stove. He had asked Mr. Cassin to return the skin to Bill Sprowl and take back the bag of bread which he had paid for it; and the progressive business-man had requested him to chase himself up the ladder, over the side and ashore. Mr. Blessington had retired, and had immediately sent word to Bill that he could not

recover the fox-skin at once but would get it some time or other.

The Sprowls lived within a quarter of a mile of the coast, on the mouth of Fox River. They lived in one house—a three-room cabin of poles, sods, and stones. Bill was the bread-winner of the family, which consisted of himself, his mother, and his grandmother. His father had been lost on the ice, while seal-hunting, many springs ago. His mother had been on the ice at the same time; she had been lost, too, in the same sudden storm of wind and snow, but had been found while still alive. And she had lived ever since—half-witted, harmless, happy enough except when the black wind came bellowing down from the north-west. Whenever the wind blew upon the shack from the north-west, she lay on the floor, covered her head with blankets and quaked and sobbed with fear. The grandmother was a sane, courageous old woman, spry on her feet, quick of tongue, and sharp enough in everything but the value of black foxes and the ways of traders. It was she who had sold Bill's black fox-skin to Luke Cassin, for a bag of hard-bread.

When Bill heard that even Mr. Blessington was unable to recover the skin, he felt that it was

lost indeed. What was the skin worth? Three hundred dollars, four hundred, perhaps five hundred. It was a perfect skin—and it was black fox. A man up Spotted Island way had sold a skin of the same kind for six hundred and fifty dollars. And that unnameable thief, Luke Cassin, had paid a bag of bread for Bill's fox! Bill sat by the fire and thought of all the things he could have done with five hundred dollars. He could have bought a dozen new blankets for the beds in the house, and a dozen new traps from the store at Black Island Tickle, a new rifle, tea, and tobacco of the best, grub enough to last for years, a team of dogs, a new coat to go a-courtin' in and a new fiddle. Think of it! Saints alive! to be robbed of all those delights and comforts by a big-nosed, black-hearted pirate from Nova Scotia. It was enough to make a better man than Bill Sprowl sit by the fire and sulk and curse. His grandmother worked the whole story out of him, in the course of his second day at home. She thought it over. She took it to bed with her.

"What bes the trouble wid ye, Bill Sprowl?" she cried, next morning. "It bes yer own skin, bain't it? Then take it back from him. Yer

gran'father would ha' took it back—aye, quick as t'inkin'."

"Sure, didn't I try it?—an' didn't he nigh bat the life out o' me?" returned Bill. "I bain't right yet, down here," and he placed a hand on the pit of his stomach.

"Ye'll git it back, Bill, if ye has to sink his schooner to do it," retorted the old woman. "Aye, ye'll git it back, b'y—or I'll do it meself. Five hundred dollars, ye say? Holy Saints presarve us, b'y, there bain't so much money as all that out o' St. John's."

"I'd be a'feared to sink his fore-an'-after," replied Bill wearily. "Mister Blessington don't allow any tricks o' that kind i' Fore-and-Aft Cove. He bes a good, kind man, Mister Blessington. Him an' Mister Hands saved my life wid their doctorin' an' their medicines. Sure, Dr. Grenfell, up to Battle Harbour, couldn't ha' doctored me any better. But I'm afeared to sink Luke Cassin's schooner. Aye, that's the trut'. I bain't afeared o' Luke Cassin, but I'd hate like the divil to anger Mister Blessington."

"Sure, b'y, he'd never know ye done it," retorted the old woman. "Ye bain't the lad I took ye for, Bill Sprowl, if ye lets that skunk keep yer

five-hundred-dollar pelt. Ye bain't the man o' spirit yer father was afore ye. What'll Kate Dormer t'ink o' ye. Tell me that now, Bill Sprowl."

What would Kate Dormer think of it, when she heard that Bill had allowed himself to be robbed of five hundred dollars? That shot told. Kate was the girl whom Bill had been courting ever since Johnny Cox had left the cove, two years ago come May. Where Johnny had gone to, and why he had stayed away so long, were questions which even Kate was unable to answer. It was thought that Johnny had shipped aboard some foreign-going vessel from Harbour Grace or St. John's. However that might be, he had promised Kate Dormer that he would come back, some day, with his pockets full of money, and marry her. Bill Sprowl had spent nearly two years in trying to prove to Kate that he, Bill, was a better man than the absent Johnny. During the past twelve months he had been making fair headway—and he could not shut his eyes to the conviction that the price of that fox-skin would put success in his hands. Five hundred dollars! Saints alive! but five hundred dollars would make Johnny Cox's talk of full pockets sound pretty small and weak.

"She'd marry ye quick as winkin', b'y, if ye could show her a pot o' money the like o' that," said the old woman.

Sly old Mother Sprowl. She wanted Bill to recover the skin; but she did not entertain the least thought of allowing him to use it as a lure for the capture of Kate Dormer. She did not want another woman in Bill's house. Far from it. Two were enough. But let Bill recover the valuable skin and she, Mother Sprowl, would see that the price of it was put to proper uses. Trust her for that. In the meantime, she would use the name of Kate Dormer for a spur.

Bill was not so easily spurred to action as she had hoped. His spirit was uneasy and his body was still sore. He was in no condition, just then, to elaborate and carry out any such desperate undertaking as the recovery of the black fox from the stronghold of Mr. Luke Cassin. His brain still buzzed and his insides still ached. Three days passed before he felt himself fit to move in the matter. He set out for the cove at noon, and walked slowly. It was a bland day. The snow on the surface of the shore-ice was wet and heavy. The land-wash was almost bare of snow; the slopes behind it gleamed wet in the sun; the

trunks of the little spruces were wet and black with melted frost. April was making herself felt, even in this far north. Bill looked eastward, abroad over the floor of sea-ice to the heave and glitter of the open sea beyond. He knew that a little more sun, and a day of warm rain and wind from the south, would set this shore-ice adrift and bring the great floes and bergs from Greenland grinding along the coast. It had been a late spring, but now that it had started it would come in a hurry.

"Luke Cassin 'll be slippin' out an' away wid the shore-ice," said Bill. And then, "But not along wid that black fox, anyhow."

He was half-way between Fox River and Fore-and-Aft Cove, when he sighted a figure approaching him along the white ice. This proved to be Mr. Alfred Hands of "The Folly". The two men halted, each removed the mitten from his right hand, and they shook hands heartily, according to the custom of the country.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. HANDS PLAYS AT BEING A MISSIONARY

"WHERE bes ye bound for, Mister Hands?" asked Bill Sprowl. "Sure, sir, I never see ye so far away from home afore."

Mr. Hands scratched his clean-shaven upper lip, then his square and polished jaw. He looked as if he were not at all sure where he was bound for. He carried a cased rifle under his arm and a pack on his broad shoulders. He wore an air of furtive uncertainty and vast good humour. He smiled. Suddenly he chuckled.

"Do you expect a man to stay at home a day like this, Bill?" he said. "And when it comes to that, where are you bound for yourself?"

"Ha, sir. I knows what ye bes up to now, Mister Hands," returned the trapper. "Ye bes off for Black Island Tickle, sir, a-girlin', sure as the divil made dog-fish. I sees it in the glimp o' yer eye, sir."

The butler laughed again.

"Bill, you're a sharp lad," he said. "But you haven't told me where you're heading for. I suppose you're on the same business. Kate was asking me after you, only yesterday. She's a fine girl, Bill, and I see that Luke Cassin is of the same way of thinking."

"Damn that black-faced, black-hearted squid!" exclaimed Bill. "He t'iefed my fox away from me, an' now he'd be after t'iefin' my girl, would he? May the divil fly away wid him! If the divil don't, I will. Sure, Mister Hands, it bes Luke Cassin I's lookin' for now."

"A dangerous man to monkey with," remarked the butler, lighting a cigarette. "I don't like him, Bill. He's not to be trusted. He's taken a spite against all of us — Mr. Blessington, and Miss Jean, and you and me and all of us. But if you are thinking of going aboard his vessel again and trying to beat him up again, don't you do it. He's in better shape than you are, Bill. And what's the use? If it's the fox-skin you want, I think I can help you to it. Keep away from the cove and out of sight of the schooner. Strike inland for Stag Pond. You know it?"

Bill Sprowl nodded eagerly.

"You know the hummock on the north end of it?"

Again Bill nodded.

"You'll find your fox somewhere on the top of that hummock, or near the top of it, hidden away somehow or other. Cassin hid it there three days ago. I guess he was afraid that Mr. Blessington would take it away from him by force, for he refused to give it up to Mr. Blessington, you know. I was looking for hares in the woods back of the pond, when I happened to see Cassin sneaking along with a bag under his arm. I had the boss's field-glasses with me, so I lay low and watched him. He fooled around that hummock for quite a while, and then he went away without the bag. I guess you'll find it there, Bill. If you do, keep quiet about it. Don't try to sell it until I give you the tip. Spend the night at "The Folly" and light out for home first thing in the morning."

Bill Sprowl showered blessings upon the head of Alfred Hands. The butler accepted them with blushes and uneasy workings of his great shoulders.

"Mind you, Bill, I wouldn't swear it's the fox-skin," he warned, "but for the life of me I don't

know what else he'd be hiding away on the top of that hummock."

They parted. Alfred Hands was not bent on "girlin'" at all, nor was he bound for Black Island Tickle. He was on his way to old Two Mink Sam's shack on Fox River, in the guise of a missionary, to look over the stranger from New York who had invaded the wilderness.

Hands had left "The Folly" too late in the morning to accomplish the entire trip to the old mountaineer's before sun-down. Also, he did not travel fast. He was in no particular hurry. He enjoyed the solitude, the vast and desolate scenery, the exercise, and his thoughts. He smiled at his thoughts.

"I guess the stalwart Luke won't be leaving us as soon as he thinks," he muttered, more than once.

He made camp on the left back of Fox River, four miles above its mouth. The night was mild; and he slept soundly in his fur-lined bag, with a blanket around his head and his feet to a sizable fire. The sun was above the hills before he arose and cooked his breakfast. He shaved while the bacon was crisping in the pan. After his meal of bacon, toast, marmalade, and coffee, he smoked

two plump cigarettes and read diligently in his Bible.

"Though I've never been what you might call a downright hellion," he said, "a bit of this won't do me any harm. A missionary is supposed to be able to hand out a bunch of texts at the slightest provocation, so I'd better get a few worked up. This isn't bad reading, anyway."

It was noon when Alfred Hands arrived at Two Mink Sam's humble door. The door was open, for the sun shone full and warm upon the little clearing above the ice-bound river. The old trapper sat alone within the hut, shaping an axe handle of a length of seasoned ash. He looked up with bright, unstartled eyes as the shadow of the visitor fell across the threshold.

"Good day to you, brother," said Mr. Hands cheerily, with an assumed-for-the-occasion, fruity note in his voice. He glanced around the dusky interior for a sight or sign of the stranger. The stranger was not in the hut; but a sign of him, in the form of a long, tin cigarette box, stood on the rough shelf above the fireplace.

"Good-day," replied Two Mink Sam, shaving away at the axe handle. "Set down. What you want?"

"I am a missionary," answered Hands, seating himself on a block of wood near the open door and easing his pack to the ground.

"Ump," replied the old trapper.

Mr. Hands sighed heavily and unbuttoned his outer coat. What next? It wasn't quite so easy as he had expected. What would a real missionary say? An ordinary man would ask the old chap about his winter's "take" of furs; but would a missionary? He glanced around the little room for inspiration. The box of cigarettes caught his eye again. He could read the label from where he sat. He knew it. They were good smokes. He remembered buying a thousand of them in London once—ten boxes like that on the shelf. But he must not think too much about such worldly things. The thoughts might slip from his tongue.

"Have you been to church lately, brother?" he asked, with desperate suddenness. He saw the absurdity of the question the moment it was out. He gasped, then strangled a burst of laughter with difficulty. Two Mink Sam let knife and axe handle slip from his fingers. For several seconds he stared at the visitor, with popping eyes and a hanging jaw. But his recovery was quick.

"Nope," he snapped, picking up the ash-wood and the knife and going on with his work.

"Of course not," said Hands, trying hard to recall to his mind, from hearsay, the situation of the nearest place of worship. Was it the Moravian chapel at White Seal Bay, forty miles to the north, or the little church of the Deep Sea Mission, at Battle Harbour? He could not decide between them. He felt that he was not doing very well as a missionary, and that even this old Indian would see through him if he didn't improve. He drew a deep breath.

"In the midst of life we are in death," he said.

Two Mink Sam paused in his whittling and hollowed a claw-like hand behind a leathery ear.

"What say?" he queried.

"In the midst of life we are in death," shouted Alfred Hands.

At that moment John Jones, the stranger, entered the hut, with his snowshoes in his hand.

"Don't you believe it, Sam," he said. "When we're dead we're dead; and when we're alive we're not dead." He turned to Mr. Hands, smiling pleasantly. "You sound something like a missionary," he said. "Glad to see you. Take off your coat and have a cigarette. Two Mink

Sam and I are partners. My name's John Jones."

A twitch of consternation disturbed the composure of Alfred Hands's face for a fraction of a second. He sagged upon his seat for a moment as if his knees had not strength enough to lift his body. But all this passed as quick as the snap of finger and thumb, and he stood up and extended his hand.

"Yes, I am a missionary," he said. "You are a stranger to these parts, I think?"

"I've only been here a few days," replied John. "Let me take your coat. Sam, it must be dinner-time."

Mr. Hands was not at his ease during the rough meal. He tried to talk as he believed a missionary should talk, made a mess of it and held his peace. He watched John Jones closely, with something like wonder in his eyes. Jones, for his part, seemed to be perfectly at his ease, and not inconsiderably amused at something. At last Two Mink Sam filled his pipe and returned to his seat by the hearth. The others lit cigarettes from the tin box. John suddenly leaned halfway across the table and grinned in his visitor's face.

"*You* a missionary. By thunder, it is as good as a play," he said.

Hands looked crestfallen. He drew back from the table, as far as the wall of the hut would admit of, and covered his mouth and chin with his left hand.

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a very lame air. "Why shouldn't I be a missionary? Even the humblest of us may accomplish some good."

"Of course," replied John politely, settling back upon the rustic contrivance which served him for a chair. "Of course you are doing no end of good as a missionary. But I'm astonished, for all that. I never dreamed of meeting you here—and it never entered my head that you would ever become a preacher—*Handy Hands.*"

The fake sky-pilot dropped his cigarette on the floor, stooped and recovered it without a word. Who would have imagined such a situation as this? It was very awkward, to say the least of it.

"Handy Hands," remarked John. "The great Handy Hands a missionary to the scattered children of the wild! It is wonderful. By George, there is something grand about it. You

always struck me as a mighty decent chap, Handy; but if anyone had told me, seven years ago, that you would forsake the flesh-pots of New York and take to toting a Bible through the wilderness, I'd have called him a liar. But don't you remember me? I never had the pleasure of seeing you fight, but when I was a freshman at Yale I took boxing lessons from you, twice a week for three months. Have I changed so in eight years, Handy? Look at me, man. Don't you remember me?"

"I think I remember your face," said Hands.

"Of course you do. What's the matter with you? Why are you pretending that you don't know me?"

"What is your name?"

John changed colour at that question, then laughed ironically.

"Don't spare me. It's a thing I'm trying to forget. You know it as well as I do, Handy. I've adopted the name of Jones for the present—John Jones. I'm a trapper now. I mean to work for a living—at honest work."

Hands tried to look as if the identity of the other had just dawned on him; but he was a poor actor.

"Why, of course, sir," he said. "I hope you will forgive my stupidity. You are young Mr. Blizzard, of New York—Mr. John Blizzard."

"And I came here to forget it," replied John.

"You astonish me," said the crafty Hands. "Why should the son of the great H. P. Blizzard want to forget his name?"

"I cannot bring myself to agree with my father on certain business matters," replied John. "My conception of—of what constitutes honest business is not his. I'm frank with you, Handy, I'm dead sick of double dealings. You see, I've been living on double dealings all my life—without knowing it. We'll say no more about it. Tell me about yourself, Handy. Whatever turned you to this sort of thing? And where do you make your headquarters?"

"I received a call," said Hands, blushing at the lie. "I wasn't educated for a real, fancy city preacher, you see, so I took to this sort of work. It is hard work, but—but virtue is its own reward. Just now I'm on my way south, as far as Battle Harbour."

"It is wonderful," said John.

"Yes, it is wonderful; but no more so than

that you should have chosen this country as a retreat from the world," replied Hands.

"Why not this country as well as any other?" asked John. "I should think that this is just the place for a fellow to hide in from the world."

"Of course, of course," returned Hands hastily. "This is a very lonely and secluded part of the world, Heaven knows. It was just chance that brought you here, I suppose?"

"Of course it was chance. Why do you ask?"

"You must admit that it is queer that you and I should meet on Fox River, after eight years. But the world is full of queer things. Did you make the journey alone? What sort of trip had you?"

"I came most of the way alone, but I had some excitement toward this end of the journey. I got a bullet through the muscle of my left shoulder"—and he straightway told the story of his adventures.

Hands had heard the story before from Charlie MacElroy, and to hear it now from John Blizzard put his suspicions at rest. John had come to this country by chance, ignorant and innocent alike of the intentions of which Hands had suspected him.

The afternoon and evening were spent in talking. They talked of the past and the future, of New York and the wilderness, of fighting, fishing, and trapping. Hands was forced to lie mightily concerning his present life and his plans for the future.

Hands left the shack of Two Mink Sam early in the morning, circled wide and struck out briskly on his old trail. He travelled fast and steadily, giving only half an hour to his midday rest and meal, and reaching the cove that night. He went straight to Mr. Blessington's study and found the ladies there also.

"Well, Hands, what do you think of him?" asked the master of "The Folly". "Sit down and tell us all about it."

Hands did not accept the invitation to take a chair.

"The stranger who is living with old Two Mink Sam, and who helped Dorian and MacElroy fight those thieves, sir, is a New Yorker," he said, "I used to know him, sir, when he was a young fellow at college. He used to take boxing lessons from me, when I had the little school and gymnasium on West Forty-Second Street, sir, after I had lost the championship, sir, and gone to the

dogs, and you had put me on my feet again. I'll swear that he's an honest man, sir, though his name is Blizzard!"

"Blizzard!" exclaimed John Blessington, rising half-way out of his chair only to drop heavily back again. "Blizzard! Good Lord!"

Mrs. Blessington let the book that she had been reading fall in her lap and from there to the floor, unheeded. The colour ebbed from her face and the fateful name trembled on her lips. Jean looked up from her game of solitaire.

"And you'll swear that he is an honest man?" she queried.

"Yes, sir, Blizzard is his name—Mr. John Blizzard," continued Hands, pleased with the dismay which he had awakened and with the knowledge that he could do much to allay it. "He's a son of H. P., sir—but I'll swear, sir, that he hasn't an ounce of the old man's wicked nature in him. And he came to this country as innocent as a lamb, sir, and knows no more about you being here than a new-born babe. But I had to lie like a cabby, sir—and he thinks I'm a missionary at this very minute, sir. I had to do it."

Mr. Blessington sighed with relief.

"Sit down, Hands, and tell your story," he

commanded. "It sounds too utterly absurd. A son of H. P. Blizzard an honest man—a son of H. P. Blizzard happening innocently into this country!"

Hands sat down on the nearest chair and told the story at length.

He made a strong case for John Blizzard.

"You are a good judge of character, Hands," said Blessington; "but I tell you frankly that I think you are mistaken in this case. It is beyond belief that the son of that rogue should feel shame, or even know the meaning of the word. He told you that he was ashamed of his name and of his father's business methods, did he? Are you sure that he was not fooling you, Hands? Is your mind quite easy on that score?"

"I'll swear that he meant every word that he said, sir," replied Hands. "You'd have believed him yourself if you'd seen him and heard him. I don't know exactly what he found out about his father's business to sicken him of it, sir, but he's sick of it, and no mistake."

"What does he look like?" asked Jean.

Hands scratched his square chin and bent his brows in thought.

"I can't recall the colour of his eyes, or the

shape of his nose, Miss Jean," he replied slowly and with gravity; "but I noticed that he stands about five feet and ten inches in his moccasins, weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds, mostly bone and muscle, looks honest and—well, Miss Jean, like a gentleman."

"His mother must have been a very remarkable and superior woman," said Mr. Blessington.

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLE

Old Sol Mitch, who had been acting as butler during Mr. Hands' absence, entered the library.

"Dat feller Bill Sprowl want to know if you get back from Black Island Tickle yet, Alfred Hands," he said, blinking his eyes at the butler.

"Mighty drunk," he added in his toneless voice.

Hands hopped to his feet. "If you'll excuse me, sir, I'd better go and talk to him," he said. "I met him on my way to Fox River, sir, and had to tell him that I was bound for Black Island Tickle.

Hands found Bill Sprowl in the kitchen, surrounded by servants and hangers-on. The trapper was certainly well heeled; but being a good-natured fellow he was doing nothing worse than trying to sing. He greeted the appearance of the butler with a shout, staggered up from his chair, and wound his long arms affectionately around those sturdy shoulders.

"Did ye see yer girl, Mister Hands?" he asked, at the shaky top of his voice. "Sure ye did. No girl could resist ye, Mister Hands. I seen my girl, too—an' there bain't a finer girl on the Larbordor. An' I see that other thing ye told me about, too, an' I got it safe an' sound where the divil hisself couldn't find it. An' I done more nor that. Aye, that there squid from Novy Scoty'll wish he hadn't crossed the bows o' Bill Sprowl. May ye never die till I kills ye, Mister Hands, an' may every hair o' yer head turn into a wax candle to light ye to glory. Aye, sir, I means it, for ye've proved a good friend to me, an' I wishes ye luck wid yer girl over to Black Island Tickle."

The women giggled and the men grinned. Hands blushed pink, wriggled from the trapper's fond embrace, and gripped him kindly but firmly by the scruff of the neck.

"You just come along with me, Bill," said Hands. "I want to have a little chat with you in private. Cook, what are you grinning at? Mary, my dear, what's the joke? Do you people think it funny to see a man with too much rum aboard him and to hear him talking nonsense? You should be ashamed of yourselves to en-

courage him. Sol Mitch, you'd better get busy and see about the family's supper, instead of standing there like a wooden image and blinking your silly eyes."

"Too much rum?" cried Bill. "Saints presarve ye, Mister Hands, there bain't too much rum for me i' the whole world. You needn't fear I bes overtook, Mister Hands. I'll not tell 'em a word about yer doin's over to Black Island Tickle, nor about my own business wid Luke Cassin. I bes sober as a missioner, Mister Hands. The more they listens to me, the less they hears. An' I found it, Mister Hands, right i' the very spot you told me to look. An' it bes hid now ——"

At this point Hands jerked violently on the other's collar.

"You come along with me," he said, with a slight tremor in his low voice. His jaws set hard. His square chin protruded.

"Sure bain't I comin' wid ye, sir, as quick as I can lay one foot behind t'other?" retorted Bill lurching heavily.

In Hands' room Bill sank upon the bed. Hands closed the door and seated himself in a chair. He lit a cigarette.

"Now, Bill, I want to know what in thunder you've been up to," he demanded. "You are beastly intoxicated, and out there in the kitchen you talked like a fool. Where did you get your jag?"

"I bain't intoxicated," said Bill sleepily. "Feels jus' right. May ye never die till I kills ye, Mister Hands, an' may ——"

"Shut up!" cried Hands violently. "Confound you, Bill, I'm ashamed of you. I try to help you, and you make fools of both of us. If you can't sit up and talk like a man, then you'd better roll off on to the floor and go to sleep like a dog."

Bill sat up, and immediately lay down again.

"I talk grand," he said. Go 'head, Mister Hands. I see Kate. Kate gran' girl entirely. Ol' Peter Dormer, he got gran' rum—an' plenty of it."

"So it seems," remarked Hands. And then, "Did you find the black fox?"

"Sure I finds him, in a bag, stowed away in a hole i' the nob o' the hummock, jes' like ye told me," replied Bill.

"And you hid it in a safe place, did you?"

"Sure I did that, Mister Hands. I hid it

where only two of us knows where to find it. Trust me, Mister Hands. I got it safe."

"Two of you? Who else knows where you have hidden it?"

"Nobody else. Nobody i' the whole world but me an' Kate—an' not even me. Kate knows where it bes hid, Mister Hands—sure, herself knows, an' nobody else i' the world. Not even me. First I hides it meself—an' then I shows it to Kate—an' Kate, she gives me a kiss—an' then she says maybe I'd be tellin' where it was, I bes that good-natured, an' that maybe she'd better hide it all over again. So I goes in an' has a drop o' rum wid Peter an' Mike, an' Kate she hides it away where the divil hisself couldn't find it in a year o' Saints' Days. There bain't a smarter nor a finer-lookin' girl on the coast nor Kate."

"Do you know what you are saying, Bill Sprowl?" asked Hands.

"Sure I knows what I bes a-sayin', Mister Hands," replied Bill. "What for wouldn't I know?"

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know where your black fox is now, after all the trouble you've taken to get it back from Luke Cassin? D'you mean to tell me that?"

"Kate knows where it bes hid away."

"How many drinks did you have before you gave it to Kate to hide?"

"Drinks? Sure now, Mister Hands, ye wouldn't be sayin' I's been drinkin' hard liquor, would ye? Saints presarve us, sir, I was only *tastin'* the stuff. Five or six, maybe—an' maybe nine or ten. But I wasn't what ye'd call drinkin', Mister Hands. Ye bes too almighty hard on a feller, Mister Hands, sir. Anyhow, the skin bes safe. Kate knows where it bes hid away."

Hands sighed. "What else did you do?" he asked.

Bill sat up on the edge of his bed and a crafty smile overspread his flushed face. He wagged a trembling finger at Mr. Hands.

"What else?" he said. "Sure, I done for Luke Cassin! Aye, afore ever I went an' found the fox I done for Luke Cassin!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the butler, sitting up and dropping the stump of his cigarette. "What do you mean?"

"I cut a hole i' the bottom o' his blasted fore-an'-after," replied Bill. "Aye, Mister Hands, a hole as big as yer head, sir. Cassin wasn't

aboard when I done it. She's froze in tight; but she'll melt away a bit to-morry or nex' day—an' then she'll founder like a old tea-kittle, sure's hell. That bes the way I done him, Mister Hands."

"When did that happen?" asked Hands quietly.

"Afore I went after the fox. Aye, afore I see the fox, or Kate, or the rum. The trader wasn't aboard at the time. Hole as big as yer head, Mister Hands. Sure, sir, I done a pretty job."

"And how many people have you told this to?"

"Not a one. I hasn't told even Kate. I see how the ice bes meltin' mighty thin all 'round the schooner. She'll be goin' down afore long."

"Lie down and go to sleep," said Hands. "Take your feet off the pillow—and make yourself at home. I want to have another talk to you in the morning—when you are sober."

Bill grumbled, but his grumbles soon thickened and regulated into snores. Hands lifted him easily from the bed, carried him into a small room near at hand, deposited him gently on the floor and spread a pair of blankets over him. He then left the room and locked the door behind him. He returned to his own room,

opened the window, and leaned far out. The air was fresh, but bland. A frail haze dimmed the stars. A fox barked far away on the barren. Faint whispers of thawing and relaxing were in the quiet air. The low eaves of the house, which had been running freely all day, had not entirely ceased to drip. A dull, muffled thud, almost too faint and smeared to call a sound, told Mr. Hands that the sodden little snow-drift in the shade of the spruces by his window had settled into itself another fraction of an inch. From seaward came a breath of sound—a slow, sobbing, stifled breath of uneasy waters shifting and blindly fumbling beneath miles of grey ice.

Mr. Hands slept soundly, but was early astir next morning. He attired himself in the respectable black of his present calling, visited the kitchen and store-room and set the wheels of the household moving, then unlocked the door of the room in which he had left Bill Sprowl. Bill was still asleep, sprawled on the floor with the blankets flung aside. Hands stooped and shook him roughly. The trapper opened dull eyes. He sat up with a jerk and a grunt and stared wildly around him.

"Oh, me poor head," he exclaimed. "May

the divil fly away wid ol' Peter Dormer an' his red rum. Saints presarve us—me poor head."

"Lie down again, Bill, and I'll bring you a cup of tea," said the butler. "No wonder your head feels bad. You were very far gone last night my boy, and talked like a fool. There's no saying what you'd have been up to next if I hadn't put you to bed."

"D'ye call this a bed?" grumbled Bill. "Ye give me the bed at first—I remembers it—an' then ye ——" and he lay down and closed his eyes and his mouth, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Hands hurried away to the kitchen, and soon returned with a cup and teapot, and a plate of dry toast, on a tray. Bill drank several cups of the tea, quick and strong. He crushed a slice of toast into his mouth and swallowed it with another cupful of tea. He looked a trifle better after that. He groaned, sighed, and rubbed his eyes with his knuckles.

"You were very drunk last night, Bill Sprowl," said the butler.

"Sure, I believes ye, Mister Hands," replied Bill.

"Do you remember what you told me about

finding the black fox and then letting Kate Dormer hide it again for you?—and about cutting a hole in the bottom of Luke Cassin's fore-and-after?"

"I don't remember tellin' it to ye, Mister Hands, but I remembers a-doin' it, sure's the saints bes in heaven. Aye, sir, if I told ye them things last night then I told ye the trut'."

"I hope your mind is now clear enough to admit a glimmer of reason on these matters. Do you see that you acted like a fool in both cases? I grant you that Kate Dormer is an attractive young woman. You say she is a friend of yours, but you must not overlook the fact that she seems to be a friend of Luke Cassin also. I've seen the trader there a dozen times, if once. If you want that fox, Bill, I advise you to go to Kate now and ask her for it—and as soon as you get it, tuck it under your arm and light out for Fox River."

"I trusts Kate Dormer as I does my own right hand," said Bill.

"But you are not acting fair to her, Bill. If the skin should be found in her possession, then she'd be named for a thief—yes, and the law could send her to jail," replied the crafty Hands. "Ac-

cording to the law, you know, that skin belongs to Luke Cassin."

"I bets ye Kate's got it hid where the devil hisself couldn't find it, Mister Hands."

"It looks to me as if you are so scared of the trader that you are afraid to take care of the skin yourself."

Bill howled at that, and waved his huge fists in the air.

"I'll go over with you," said Hands. And then, "But what do you mean to do about the hole in Cassin's schooner? What'll you do when it goes to the bottom of the harbour—to-day or to-morrow? Cassin won't have to guess twice to know who did the trick. He'll have the law on you—and you'll be sent to jail in Newfoundland."

"He'll never git the law on me. I'll kill him first."

"You'll get your fox-skin, Bill, and then you go home and lie low—and you'll sleep with one eye open for the next week or so. Now get your clothes on, and eat the rest of that toast and empty the teapot. I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

Hands wrote a note for Mr. Blessington and

left it with Sol Mitch. Then he ate a few slices of buttered toast, and drank a few cups of coffee in the kitchen. He put on moccasins and a blanket coat and rejoined Bill Sprowl. Bill was ready, though he wobbled on his feet. They left the house by a side door. The newly risen sun struck strong across the ice and the sodden barren. There was a glow in its touch. Early though the hour was, roofs and rocks were already commencing to steam. The two advanced straight toward the cove, the hidden hamlet, the miles of sodden ice now flashing white and silver in the sun. They halted at the edge of the broken sea-wall and looked down upon the grey cabins and grey "stages" of the hamlet clinging and nestling among the black rocks ; upon the upthrust, broken ice along the landwash, already aglint with veins and pools of water ; farther out at the fore-and-after lying peacefully in the flat white field in mid-harbour. The trading-schooner lay in a safe berth. The entrance to the cove was so narrow, so well guarded by its black capes and out-posted rocks, that no crush and grind of outside ice could jar the peace of its inner basin. Its own ice would melt gradually where it lay, with no more movement than a slight shoreward thrust when the

great floes went grinding past, melt, rot, and at last break and drift and vanish. The trader had berthed his schooner in the safest harbour within twenty miles. He was a shrewd man.

Smoke floated up from ten humble chimneys and from a rusty pipe which protruded from the forward deck of the schooner.

"Come on," said Hands, and led the way down a twisting path. Bill Sprowl followed, breathing huskily and stepping wide now and again. They wound their way in and out among the rocks, cabins, wood-stacks and grey drying-stages whereon many a season's hard-won catch of fish had been cured in the sun and wind. They halted at the door of Peter Dormer's cabin, and the butler rapped on it with his bare knuckles. The door opened immediately, as if even dead wood could not stand against the rap of that compact and hammer-like fist. Kate herself stood in the low doorway. She was a fine figure of a young woman, and no mistake. Her dark blue eyes flashed upon Mr. Hands, warm and wide, then gleamed coldly upon Bill Sprowl of Fox River.

"Good mornin', Mister Hands," she said. "Ye bes up an' about early for sure. Step right in—

both o' ye. But it's mighty good-natured I be, Bill Sprowl, to ax ye into the house at all, ye was that drunk las' night. Sure, Mister Hands, he went on like a mad Injun."

Bill's face went white, then dusky red. He stared at the girl, then at Hands, then back at the girl. Kate tossed her fine head, her eyes upon the butler. The butler scratched his chin and gazed down at the toes of his skinnywoppers.

"Sure, Kate, wasn't it yerself poured every drop o' the rum for me, wid yer own hands?" cried Bill, in husky and injured tones.

Kate laughed scornfully.

"Ye great loon, ye was that overtook wid the rum ye just grabbed the jug an' guzzled it," she exclaimed. "Saints forgive ye, Bill Sprowl, would ye be darin' to say as how I poured the rum for ye, afore my own face—an' afore Mister Hands?"

"For the love o' Heaven, Kate, what bes the matter wid ye?" asked the trapper. "Ye wasn't like this last night, my darlint."

Alfred Hands stopped scratching his chin. He raised his head and regarded the girl with his small, clear, steady eyes. He squared his splendid shoulders.

"I can't come in just now, Kate," he said. "I

have to get back to the house in a few minutes. Bill was very drunk last night, of that there can be no doubt, and very likely he has got things more or less muddled in his poor head. Bill, you shut up until I'm done. I came to speak to you about him, my dear. He's a friend of mine, you know, in spite of his faults. If you'll be so kind as to shut the door behind you for half a minute, Kate, so that we three may have a word in private, I'll be greatly obliged."

Kate's lips parted, and a light of doubt, of uneasiness, crept into her eyes and troubled their warm depths; but she reached behind her with her right hand and pulled the door shut.

"It's about the black fox," said Hands. "Bill wants it back."

Kate's eyes hardened and her lips set straight and firm. She shot a withering glance at the limp and uncomfortable trapper.

"What fox bes ye talkin' about Mister Hands?" she asked.

"Bill's black fox. The one he got you to hide for him, last night!" replied Hands quietly.

"Last night," said the girl. "Sure he didn't show no black fox, nor any other sort o' fox, to me, Mister Hands." She turned to Bill. "Ye

silly, drunken loon, what story has ye been tellin' to Mister Hands?"

"My fox-skin!" cried Bill. "Kate, I give it to ye to hide away for me—an' ye hid it!"

"He bes dreamin'," said the girl to Hands. "Too much rum!"

Hands took the bewildered Bill by the arm.

"Come along, Bill," he said. And then to the young woman, "Thank you, Kate. You'll hear from me again."

CHAPTER X

MORE TROUBLE IN FORE-AND-AFT COVE

Alfred Hands took Bill Sprowl back to "The Folly". Poor Bill wanted to go back and argue with Kate, but Hands urged him onward.

"Just you leave that young woman to me," said the ex-pugilist. "She's a bad one, Bill—as cool a liar as ever I saw. What her game is I don't know; but you may be quite sure that whatever it is, it's a lot too deep for you. The only thing for you to do is to go home and lie low—and forget her. I'll watch her. You just leave her to me."

The after-effects of the rum had been bad enough alone, but with Kate's treachery added, Bill was fairly undone. He admitted that his brains "felt all abroad". Hands urged and dragged him to "The Folly," forced him to eat a good breakfast and outfitted him for his return to Fox River.

"Go straight home—and stay there till you

hear from me," he said. "If you don't go home—if you turn and sneak back to the cove—I'll break your neck."

Bill's dull eyes brightened a little with wonder and interest.

"Yerself, Mr. Hands?" he queried. "Would ye be breakin' my neck yerself, sir? Ye bain't much more nor half my size, Mister Hands."

"I mean what I say," replied the butler, quietly. "You must obey me, for your own good. I weigh exactly one hundred and sixty-five pounds, Bill, and I'm considerably more than half your size. I'm a stronger man than you, Bill—and I've got science. Here, feel my arms and my shoulders. Feel my chest and my back. Pinch them."

Bill obeyed, grinding and pinching at the butler with his strong fingers. Amazement grew and deepened upon his bearded face.

"Saints presarve ye, Mister Hands, but ye've got yer coat full o' rocks!" he exclaimed.

"Those are my muscles," said Hands modestly. "I've got them hardened up now—and now I let them go slack and they're as limber as oil. I don't want to brag, Bill, but I'll tell you that if I should be forced, for your own good, to hit you

once, you'd be out of business for a week, and you could slug away at me all day without once laying a glove on me. I tell you this for your own good, Bill. Now will you go home?—straight home?"

"I bain't scart o' any man livin' except Mr. Blessington," replied Bill, "but I'll go straight home, Mister Hands."

So Bill Sprowl went back to the cabin near the mouth of Fox River, weary, angry and bewildered. His fox-skin had been tricked away from him for the second time; but this time by the girl he loved—by the girl he had trusted. The world seemed to have fallen about his ears, and he felt as if more than one lumpy fragment of the wreck had hit him on the head and heart. Kate! Saints alive, Kate Dormer, who'd have thought it of you? From one thing only could he derive any thought of satisfaction—and this was the hole which he had cut in the bottom of Luke Cassin's schooner. Plodding slowly, heavy of heart and head, he returned to Fox River.

Hands said nothing to his master about Bill's affairs. He felt that they were not worth troubling Mr. Blessington with, and he knew that he would be asked no questions. He went about his commonplace work until noon, brisk, thorough,

and silent. Twenty minutes before lunch was to be served he pulled on his skinnywoppers and climbed a little knoll behind the house. He had brought a pair of field-glasses with him, and through these he studied the schooner in the harbour. He had not been at this a minute before he was joined by Jean Blessington.

"What are you looking at?" asked Jean.

Mr. Hands lowered the glasses and lifted his tweed cap.

"I'm watching that fore-and-after, Miss Jean," he replied. "I expect her to founder at any moment."

The girl was astonished. Hands gave the glasses to her, and told her of Bill's adventures briefly and clearly.

"I can't find it in my heart to blame Bill," said the girl, "and I'd not be sorry to see the schooner sink. As for Kate Dormer—well, I am disgusted with her. I have always suspected her of being a bit of a cat, but I never dreamed that she was bad enough to play a trick like that on Bill Sprowl. I suppose her game is to give the fox back to the trader. I think she wants to marry that miserable trader."

"I think you are right, Miss Jean," returned

Hands. "You'll keep all that I've told you to yourself for a while, won't you, Miss Jean? All we can do just now is to watch the game and try to cover Bill's tracks. It is not worth bothering your father with, Miss."

"I'll keep quiet," said Jean. "But look, Hands! Isn't she very low in the ice? And there is Luke Cassin on deck, waving his arms. Look!"

"She's settling, miss. She'll be gone in a minute," replied Hands.

The little vessel rocked slowly from bow to stern, rolled slowly from side to side like something alive and grievously wounded, then settled lower in her bed of sodden ice. Men, women, and children were already on the ice, running and shouting. The big trader, with a desperate gesture of rage and consternation, and a bullish bellow which rang up to the ears of the watchers on the knoll, set a foot on the low bulwarks and sprang over the side. He struck the ice too close to the schooner, and it broke under his weight. Down he went, head under. Jean clutched the butler's right arm; the butler smiled and continued to gaze at the scene of brisk action. Up came the trader's head and shoulders. He flung

his arms out upon the unbroken ice, heaved himself upward and forward with a mighty effort and wriggled out upon the ice. The people of the cove stood grouped about twenty yards away, now silent, staring at the schooner and the trader. The trader scrambled to his feet and started toward the group, roaring threats of vengeance; but something, very likely a sound from the schooner, halted and turned him. He stood motionless between the group of fisher-folk and the labouring vessel like a statue of wrath. The schooner pitched heavily by the head, lifted, with a rolling motion, pitched again. Water splashed out upon the ice. The ice around the lips of the basin crunched and broke. The schooner wallowed desperately and heavily, pitched again—and sank. A wave washed up upon the ice and trickled back slowly into the black and heaving basin. Out of the black water slanted the slender topmast of the schooner, pointed toward the hamlet on the cliff-side like an accusing finger. Blocks and splinters of ice heaved around it. A bellow of rage and despair burst from the trader. He turned and dashed at the fisher-folk. The group scattered and raced for shore.

Mr. Hands looked at his watch.

"I must go back to the house and serve luncheon, Miss Jean," he said. He glanced respectfully at the girl. Her face was colourless and her eyes were shadowed with pity.

"Oh, the poor schooner!" she said. "It was like seeing some huge animal die—some huge, helpless animal."

They started toward the house. Hands halted suddenly.

"I feel a bit uneasy about Luke Cassin," he said. "Do you think I may be excused from serving luncheon, Miss Jean? I feel that it is my duty to go down and try to quiet the trader. Otherwise, he might kill some one, or get killed himself."

"Go, by all means," replied Jean. "I will explain. Please hurry. Don't you think you had better take a revolver?"

"Thank you, Miss Jean. No, I don't think I'll need a relvover. If he kicks up any serious trouble I'll use my fists," returned Hands.

When the butler reached the hamlet he found the trader in command of every twisting path and narrow terrace, every door shut and barred and sealing-guns protruding from several windows. Luke Cassin was raving with rage. In his right

hand he carried a stake of birch. He ran around and around the silent cabins, now and again pausing for long enough to kick upon a door with his great sea-boots or hurl a threat at an open window.

Alfred Hands removed a ring from a finger of his right hand, settled his cap close upon his head, and met the trader in the middle of one of the twisty paths.

"What's the trouble this morning, Mr. Cassin?" he asked politely.

"Trouble?" roared the trader, coming to a stop within two feet of the butler. "Trouble, you smug-faced flunkey! Some ——, —— son of a —— has cut the bottom out o' my schooner! She's foundered! That's the trouble, damn you, if you want to know. But there'll be more of it. These here white-livered, thievin' sons of squids will pay for it—aye, in blood an' money. Out o' my way, you pie-faced soup-server, or I'll crack you over the head."

"Calm yourself," replied Hands. "Tearing 'round like a fool won't help you. Go easy, or maybe you'll get hurt. Don't you see the guns sticking out of the windows? Who do you suspect, anyway?"

"Suspect?" roared the trader, crimson with fury. "I suspect every dirty, d—— soul of you, from that old fool Blessington down. Out of my way, dish-washer, or I'll break yer head."

"I see that you are determined to get shot," said Hands. "If I hit you, Cassin, remember that it is for your own good. It is better for me to hit you gently than to let you get filled up with slugs and buck-shot."

The trader stepped back and swung his club with both hands; and at the same moment Hands darted forward and shot out his right fist. The trader came down on the back of his head and lay still. His club flew feebly into the air. Hands stooped over him, tore open the neck of his numerous woollen shirts and felt his heart. Doors opened and the population came out and gathered around Hands and the unconscious trader.

"Lend me a hand with this man," ordered the butler. "He must go up to the house again for repairs. Pick him up, two of you—and handle him carefully. No crowding, please. Out of the way, Mother Flinn."

"For the love o' the saints, Mister Hands, what was it ye hit him wid?" asked old Pat

Whallen. "Glory be, he lep' up in the air like he was hoisted wid dinnymite."

Hands thrust his fist under the old fellow's nose.

"That's what I hit him with," he said, his voice trembling; "and it's a sad thing that the men of this harbour haven't the courage to fight with the same weapon."

So it came about that Luke Cassin returned to "The Folly".

Because of the sinking of the schooner, and the knocking-out of the trader, Hands was forced to tell the whole story to Mr. Blessington. Mr. Blessington listened without comment, slowly smoking his cigar. When Hands was finished, Blessington asked, "Did you have to hit him very hard?"

"A trifle harder than I intended to," admitted the butler. "You see, sir, he would have clubbed me in a half-second."

"You are a true friend to me, Alfred Hands," said the other, "and I must ask you not to run into any needless dangers. Remember that even your wonderful skill and strength would stand for nothing against a bullet or an act of treachery. But about this fellow Cassin. How is he feeling now? Has he come to himself?"

"He is doing very well, sir, but I'm afraid to let him out in his present state of mind. He'd very likely go down to the village and attack the entire population—and get himself shot."

"He does not lack courage."

"He's brave enough, sir, in his own way; but it is not the best kind of courage, sir, because he's naturally a dirty fighter."

"Tell him that if he will recover the black fox and return it to me, for Bill Sprowl, that I will pay him for his schooner," said Mr. Blessington.

Hands went to the trader's room. Cassin lay in bed, slightly dizzy, but otherwise none the worse for the scientific blow on the chin. He scowled at Hands. Hands smiled pleasantly in return.

"Mr. Blessington says that if you will recover that black fox-skin and give it to him, for Bill Sprowl, he will repay you for the loss of your schooner," said Hands.

The trader sat bolt upright in his bed.

"What's that?" he queried, in tones of doubt and amazement. "He says he'll pay me for the loss of my schooner, does he? Then what did he let them sink her for?"

"Mr. Blessington had nothing to do with the

sinking of your schooner," retorted Hands. "Are you such a fool that you believe he'd play a low trick like that on a man like you—or on any man? You don't know a gentleman when you see one, Cassin. Well, what do you say to his offer?"

"Will he repay me for the stock too?" asked the trader.

"That's what he meant, I suppose," replied Hands. "He'll do the right thing, anyway. What value do you put on the vessel and the stuff aboard her?"

The trader named a figure, after a good deal of reckoning.

"Is that the exact figure?" asked the butler. "If you try any funny business, you know, you'll get nothing at all. Mr. Blessington does not like to have an unfair advantage taken of his generosity."

Luke Cassin named a lower figure. "That's rock bottom," he said.

"Very good," replied Hands. "When you give Mr. Blessington that skin, in perfect condition as it was when you got it, he'll give you the money. I suppose you know where to find the skin, by the way?"

The trader glanced at him with sudden suspicion.

"I guess you can leave that to me," he said. "I guess I know where I put it. What d'you take me for, anyway?"

"How long is it since you've seen Kate Dormer?"

"What's that to you? Now see here, Mister Hands, I know all about the little game you an' Bill Sprowl tried to play on me. If you want to know, I saw Kate last night. That's the time she fooled you and that fat-head Sprowl."

"Very good," returned Hands calmly. "If you keep quiet now I think you'll be able to go and get the fox to-morrow morning. By the way, have you any idea who cut the hole in the schooner?"

"That's easy," replied Cassin, with a savage chuckle. "Bill Sprowl did the job, I guess, with a little help from every son of a —— in this cove, yerself included. I done Bill on a business deal, you see, an' I beat him in a fight, an' I took his girl away from him. But if Blessington pays me for the schooner an' the stock, I'll call it quits with Bill. I've got his girl, anyhow—and I will buy a new schooner."

"And another thing you must do is to keep a civil tongue in your head," replied the butler.

After luncheon Jean went out for a walk. She was shod with water-tight skinnywoppers and carried a light sporting rifle. There was always a chance of getting a shot at a fox or timber wolf; but it is not at all likely that Jean would take advantage of such a chance. She loved the wilderness, the spirit of adventure, and the spirit of the chase, but she entertained a strong objection to the needless taking of animal life. She walked westward across the barrens, edging the thawing lakes and climbing knolls and hummocks. She was accompanied by an old English setter. At last she sat down on a dry rock on the top of a hummock about four miles from the cove. The dog continued to range about the foot of the hummock, through the black thickets of spruce-tuck, and in and out among the boulders. It went out of her sight behind a covert of green spruces on a little rise of ground, and suddenly began to bark. Jean whistled. The setter appeared for a moment, yelped at her excitedly, then vanished again behind the spruces. Jean picked up her rifle, and descended the hummock to see what the dog had

found. The dog was now yelping and barking frantically. Jean rounded the knoll of spruces and halted with a little gasp of dismay. A man sat on a rock, not twenty feet away, looking straight at her with a sly and somewhat apprehensive smile on his face. A pack lay beside him, and two rifles leaned against his knee. He was an absolute stranger to Jean—and not a very attractive looking one at that. The dog jumped and barked and yelped half-way between Jean and the stranger, evidently angry and distrustful.

"Who are you?" asked Jean steadily.

The stranger stood up, and as he did so both rifles slipped to the ground. They attracted Jean's attention. She glanced at them—and in a flash the story of the midnight battle in the woods, as told by Charlie MacElroy, came to her. She remembered that the rascal who had escaped had carried away with him the rifle of the rascal who had been killed. Could this be the same man? And what was he doing here?"

"I belongs hereabouts, miss," said the fellow. "Fore-an'-aft Cove bes my home, an' my name bes Johnny Cox. I's a poor sailor, jus' gettin' home from the ends o' the earth."

Jean had heard from the folk in the hamlet of

Johnny Cox the sailor. She knew that he was an old flame of Kate Dormer. She felt vastly relieved to find him anything so harmless.

"I'm glad you've come home," she said, "but why do you carry two rifles?"

The fellow lost colour, jumped up as if he had been burnt, stooped and snatched up one of the weapons.

CHAPTER XI

THE RUN-AWAYS

JOHNNY Cox's sudden change of countenance and threatening gesture set Jean's heart jumping with an excitement that would have been panic with a woman less hardy and courageous. As it was, the girl uttered a sharp cry, but at the same moment she brought her rifle to her shoulder and covered the stooping sailor.

"What are you about?" she asked sharply.

Cox had one of the weapons in his hand, raised a foot from the ground. He lifted his head, looked at the girl and at the rifle that covered him unwaveringly, and became as motionless as stone.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Jean. "Why did you jump so—and grab your rifle—and look so frightened? What are you afraid of?"

The man straightened himself slowly. Relief and something of confusion showed in his small eyes and sly mouth.

"I—I ax yer pardon, miss," he said. "My poor

narves bes that distracted, miss, wid sufferin' an' sorrow, I bain't myself at all. I's had a hard v'yage. . . . The two guns, ye say? Sure, miss, I found one o' them in the woods. I bes a poor man, so I spelled it along wid me."

"You are on your way home to the cove now, I suppose?" queried Jean, lowering her rifle but continuing to watch the fellow sharply.

"Aye," he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Aye, for sure, as fast as my poor feet will spell me along."

They returned to the cove together. Jean walked behind, watchful, her rifle under her right arm. It took them an hour and a half to make the journey, for Johnny Cox walked very slowly. Jean had taken a keen dislike to the sailor, so she did not encourage him to talk. He asked her a few questions, however, which disclosed the fact that he knew her to be John Blessington's daughter, though he had never seen her before, and that the big house had been under the process of construction at the time of his last visit to the cove. He asked very tenderly after Kate Dormer, and Jean answered him, somewhat ironically, that Kate was still very much alive and still unmarried. Jean stopped at "The Folly," and the home-comer

passed on and vanished over the edge of the cliff.

Jean reported the adventure to her father and mother immediately upon entering the house. She did not forget to mention the two rifles. Blessington seemed to consider the information of considerable importance. Now he recalled the fellow to his mind, though he had not given a thought to him for years. Johnny Cox was the only man belonging to the cove or the neighbourhood who had gone out into the big world since Mr. Blessington had settled on the coast. This fact in itself made of Cox a possible menace to Blessington's plans—a thing which Blessington had overlooked. Now he saw it. And why had the fellow approached the cove from the west carrying two rifles? Was he so anxious to get home that he could not wait a month for the opening of navigation?

"I think he is worth watching," said Blessington. "I'll speak to Hands about it. We'll set Charlie MacElroy to spy on him. I never liked the fellow's looks, now that I come to think of it."

In the meantime, Johnny Cox had reached the cove and added considerably to the existing excitement of the place. Men, women, and children

crowded around him, inspired by curiosity rather than personal regard—for, to be quite frank, Mr. Cox, the deep-sea sailor, was not highly thought of in his native harbour. Only Kate Dormer and his mother had been fond of him—and now his mother was dead. In the old days he had been considered tricky. His fellows had not mourned when he turned his attentions to foreign seafaring. A story existed to the effect that he had once cheated his own father out of a new skiff and a cod-trap. But now the people crowded around him to ask questions. Where had he been? Why had he stayed away for so long? How had he come? Why hadn't he waited for the opening of navigation, instead of making the terrible overland journey from Canada? No sane man (so they said), would undertake that journey unless forced to it by a need as hot and bitter as the devil himself. No other native of Four-and-Aft Cove had ever so much as dreamed of it. It wasn't natural (so they maintained) for a fisherman to tramp across hundreds of miles of tractless forests and pathless barrens. Even in the heat of their curiosity they could not let pass a chance of criticizing the actions of Johnny Cox.

The sailor's answers to some of these questions

were very lame. He spoke of foreign countries with a glib tongue, but when he said that he had made the overland journey, alone and without dogs, simply because he could not exist another month without seeing Kate Dormer, his fellow-villagers wagged their heads and wondered what devilment he was up to now.

"Sure, b'y, Kate bes gettin' along fine widout ye," said old Pat Whallen. "There bes Bill Sprowl, o' Fox River, a-courtin' her desperate, t'ree times a week an' more; an' now she bes jiggin' for Mister Luke Cassin, the trader from up-along."

Old Peter Dormer spoke up at that.

"She bain't jiggin' for the trader," he said. "He bain't no trader now, anyhow, wid his fore-an'-after on the bottom o' the harbour."

"Kate bes a smart reckoner," said a young man who had wooed her in vain. "She bain't the one to jig a trader widout a schooner."

Kate herself did not appear to welcome the sailor home from his wanderings. Johnny Cox broke away from the questioners at last and escaped to Peter Dormer's cabin. There he found Kate, who had already heard of his arrival. At the sight of her his blood warmed, and many

tender and pleasant memories quickened in his weak and calculating heart. Kate was not to be trusted, but she was very pleasant to look at and to be on "courting" terms with. Johnny shut the door with his heel, slam in Peter Dormer's bewhiskered face, turned and shot home the bolt. Then he advanced half-way across the little room and tried to enfold Kate in his arms, but she avoided him with a twist of her strong and agile body and a thrust of her rounded arms.

"Mind yerself now, Johnny Cox!" she exclaimed. "Ye forgets me year in and year out, an' now ye comes home an' tries to make a fool o' me all over again."

"Forget ye!" cried the sailor. "Saints alive, Kate, ye never lifted from me thoughts so much as one minute." (Mr. Cox was a natural liar.) Didn't I work for ye an' dream o' ye, an' walk hundreds an' hundreds o' miles on me own two feet to see ye again? Didn't I promise to come back to ye wid a pocket full o' money for ye?—an' here it be."

He pulled a small canvas bag out of an inner pocket of his inner coat. The woman caught her breath and let her warding arms fall at her sides. Her eyes brightened, then softened. She leaned

forward, staring at the bag in the sailor's big, fumbling, discoloured hands. Cox untied the string at last, thrust in a thumb and finger, and pulled out a wad of something wrapped in waterproof cloth. This also was tied with a piece of strong twine in many hard knots. His fingers plucked and picked at the knots in vain. Kate uttered a gasp of exasperation, put out her left hand and snatched the packet, seized a knife from the table and cut the string with one violent slash. In another second the cloth was unwound and she was staring at a thick roll of paper money—of green and yellow American bank bills. She had seen one or two bits of this kind of paper before, and knew something of their power. She knew they were real money.

"An' there bes plenty more where that come from," said Johnny. "All I has to do is go back an' ax for it."

"Who give it to ye?" she whispered.

The sailor grinned his sly grin.

"Sure, 'twas a rich man," he said. "I didn't make it a-sailin' on the sea, Kate, ye can lay to that. If ye come away wid me, Kate—away back up-along, ye'll see him give me t'ree times as much as this — aye, an' maybe more, if

what I has to tell him bes what he wants to know."

Again he grabbed at her—and this time his arms enfolded her. She did not resist. Far from it. Kate was a ready reckoner, as the young man outside had said a little while before.

Luke Cassin breakfasted early the next morning and then left the Folly, accompanied by Alfred Hands. The trader was in a hurry to get the black fox from Kate, hand it over to Mr. Blessington and so recover the value of his vessel and stock-in-trade. It was easy money. He reflected that John Blessington must be one of the most generous of men or one of the most foolish, or one of the deepest. What was his game, anyway? Why was he willing to pay the price of a schooner and a bunch of peltries and store-stuff for the satisfaction of returning a fox-skin to Bill Sprowl?

The two came to Peter Dormer's house and Hands knocked on the door. Mike, Kate's brother, opened it. Mike was a very good lad and he blushed at the sight of his visitors. He stammered in answer to their hearty greetings.

"I want to speak to Kate for a minute," said the trader.

Mike shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Step in, skipper, he said, without enthusiasm. "Step in, Mister Hands." He moved aside from the door and the two entered the cabin. "If ye bes lookin' for Kate, then ye bes too late," he added.

The trader turned upon him quick as a cat.

"Too late?" he cried. "What the hell d'ye mean by that?"

"She bain't here, sir," replied the young fisherman faintly, keeping a way of retreat by the open door in the corner of his eye. He knew the trader to be a strong and violent person. "She bain't here, skipper, an' that bes the trut'."

Luke Cassin's ugly face began to twist and darken. His chest heaved and his big hands closed. He tried to speak, but accomplished nothing more than a sputter of sound. Young Mike Dormer edged nearer to the open door. Hands nudged the trader with his elbow.

"Keep your shirt on, Luke Cassin," he said. He looked at Mike. "Where is she?" he asked. "Out with it, lad."

"She run away las' night wid Johnny Cox," stammered Mike.

Luke Cassin gave vent to a bellow of rage and sprang forward. Mike darted through the doorway, doubled around the wood-stack, dodged around a big rock, and bolted along one of the twisty paths leading upward to the barrens. But he might have saved himself all of this except the first jump and double, for the trader did not follow him beyond the threshold. It was not Mike he was after, but Kate; and he felt less anxiety for the whereabouts of Kate than for the whereabouts of the black fox. She had played him a dirty trick, to be sure—tumbled his pride in the dust—slapped him fair and square in the face; but it was the fate of the fox-skin that really mattered.

He hurled a few oaths after the agile Mike, then turned and grabbed the butler by the arm.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "I know where she hid it. If she's taken it along with her!—Hell! A man's a fool to trust a woman!"

At that moment old Peter Dormer appeared from an inner room. He greeted them with a knowing chuckle and a three-tooth grin.

"Saints alive, skipper, bes ye that desperate over Kate?" he said. "Sure, she bes a fine girl, but herself an' Johnny Cox was lovers when they

was children. Ye wouldn't ax her to cast loose a old love for a new, would ye, skipper dear?"

"To hell with Kate," cried the enraged trader. "It's the black fox I'm frettin' about. If she's stole that on me I'm a ruined man."

"The fox-skin Bill Sprowl give her?" queried the old man with mock innocence. "Sure, skipper, she took it along wid her."

Luke dashed from the house and into the door of the little lean-to shed. Hands followed him. Empty barrels, a keg of salt and another of cured fish, a skiff and boat-gear, old bread bags, patched sails, and nets old and new lay in confusion over the pole floor of the shed. The trader fell upon this confused mass and commenced clearing the left-hand inner corner of the floor with frantic haste. He heaved the skiff over on its beam-ends with a crash. Empty barrels went flying and full ones went spinning. He stooped and raised a section of pole from the floor. A cry of rage and consternation escaped him. The skin of the black fox was not there! The girl had robbed him, and made a fool of him, even as she had robbed and made a fool of Bill Sprowl! And now he was a ruined man!

"You'll have to follow them and get it back,"

said Alfred Hands. "Come up to the house and I'll fit you out. I think they'll stick to the coast. Yes, they'll hide somewhere on the coast until navigation opens. You can go one way and Archie MacElroy the other."

They hastened back to "The Folly". The cove was ahum with excitement. Hands reported the departure of Johnny Cox to Mr. Blessington. From Mike he had learned that the sailor and Kate had slipped away from the cove shortly after dark of the night before. Both Hands and Blessington were worried.

"Tell Cassin that I want Johnnie Cox more than I want the skin," said Mr. Blessington. "I want that mysterious, two-rifle sailor very badly. Better send another man along with him, and two in the other direction. Put it to them all as strong as you see fit. I have very grave suspicions of Johnnie Cox's mission to this place at this time."

"Yes, sir," replied Hands. "I'll caution the trader that you want this fellow Cox brought back alive, sir."

"Alive, by all means," returned John Blessington. "Give them all their instructions, fit them out, and send them off as quickly as possible."

The trader selected the northern route for himself and the wood-chopper who was detailed to accompany him. He felt convinced that the run-aways had gone north, for he had put the question to the toss of his lucky fifty-cent piece. Hands impressed the fact upon him that Mr. Blessington wanted Johnny Cox, alive, even more than he wanted the black fox, and that he was exceedingly liberal in his treatment of those who brought him what he wanted.

Charlie MacElroy, with a youth from the cove, headed southward.

The trader and Jim Whallen went forward at top speed along the slushy shore-ice. Each carried a twenty-five pound pack, a sleeping-bag, and a rifle. They wore water-tight skinnywoppers on their feet and short, round snowshoes. The run-aways had left no sign of a trail on the ice. This fact did not bother Luke Cassin. It was his opinion that Cox and Kate had followed the top of the cliff, so as to leave no tracks. Very good. By keeping to the ice, and so cutting across the mouths of many little coves and inlets, he would save many miles in a day's journey. Speed was the thing. He felt sure that the fugitives would not risk a halt of more than

a few hours until they reached Black Island Tickle. With luck he might overtake them at Black Island Tickle. Late though their start had been, they made camp, two hours after sunset, several miles beyond the mouth of Fox River. Jim Whallen grumbled when he was roughly awakened at three in the morning, and informed that breakfast was ready and that he had exactly fifteen minutes to eat it. The trader silenced his grumbling with an oath. Jim was ready in fifteen minutes. Again they sped northward. A slight frost had dried the slush on the ice, and so the "going" was better than it had been the day before. The stars were clear, but the light they shed upon grey ice and black rock was weird and disheartening. After a while dawn lifted red behind their backs. The sun slid up into a clear sky, trailed for a little way by a glory of red and gold. Shortly after seven o'clock they went ashore, built a little fire, and put the smoky kettle on to boil. Each drank two mugs of steaming, strong tea and ate two cakes of hard-bread. They were about to repack the kettle and mugs and continue their journey, when a man appeared around a little point of rocks not twenty yards away. The three caught sight of each

other at the same moment. It was Bill Sprowl, of Fox River. The trader dropped the tea kettle and snatched up his rifle, but Bill also had a rifle.

"Ye didn't find me at home, did ye?" jeered Bill, squinting along the barrel of his old Snyder.

He was master of the situation, for the trader's rifle was still in its woollen case and Jim Whallen considered himself to be strictly a non-combatant.

"I wasn't lookin' for you," replied Cassin. 'You sunk my schooner, I know; but that ain't troublin' me now. I'm huntin' for Kate Dormer and Johnny Cox—and if I don't find them I'm a ruined man."

The rifle wavered in Bill's hands.

"Johnny Cox!" he cried. "Johnny Cox. He bain't nowhere in this country."

"He come home yesterday," said the trader; "and last night he run away with Kate Dormer —an' the black fox."

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN WHO IS ASHAMED OF HIS NAME TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME AGAIN

Bill Sprowl let his rifle fall to the black rocks of the landwash. He cursed Johnny Cox, and he cursed the treachery of Kate Dormer. The trader enjoyed his despair.

"Bill Sprowl," he said, "I don't like you, and I ain't lookin' for your friendship. You sunk my schooner for me, and the sight of your face fair turns my stomach upside down, but I guess we'd better git together on this deal. The fox is yours—if we get it. Blessington sent me after it, and he means to give it back to you; but I want Johnny Cox too. If I find Cox an' the skin an' Kate, the skin an' the girl are yours—for all I care. If you find them then Johnny Cox is mine —and you keep the others. What d'ye say to that? Is it a go?"

Bill thought it over for three minutes.

"Aye, it bes a bargain," he said. "Jim

Whallen, d'ye hear our bargain ? May the divil fly away wid ye, Luke Cassin, if ye breaks it."

Bill continued on his homeward way. He promised to provision himself and then search the valley of Fox River. If he failed to find any trace of the fugitives on the river he would cut overland to Black Island Tickle.

And so the hunters went forth, two to the north and two to the south and one up the valley of Fox River.

Johnny Cox felt sure that he and Kate would not be allowed to carry off the valuable and disputed fox-skin (the history of which he had learned from Kate), without exciting the displeasure of both the trader and Sprowl; and Kate was vain enough to think that they would be pursued for her sake more fiercely than for that of the fox. They agreed that the lines of pursuit would probably lie up and down the coast, therefore that their safest course lay inland. It was their intention to lie low in some secluded spot in the near interior until the breaking of the ice, then to creep down to some little harbour other than Fore-and-Aft Cove, embark in a skiff for Battle Harbour and there go aboard the coastal steamer from St. John's,

Newfoundland, on the southward run of her first trip. From St. John's they would sail for Boston. Cox had a pocketful of money, as we know, and Kate the black fox that was worth five hundred dollars, at least; and Johnny Cox said that there was a lot more money waiting for him in New York. He was convinced that the information in his possession concerning Fore-and-Aft Cove was exactly what his wealthy patron desired. And so it happened that these two started inland that night, instead of up or down the coast, and set off on a long slant to the north and west, aiming for the cabin on Fox River inhabited by Two Mink Sam.

John Jones (to give his new name) returned from visiting a bear trap farther up stream and found Mr. Cox and Miss Dormer taking their ease in the cabin the while his ancient partner fried bacon and flap-jacks for their refreshment. John carried his rifle, uncased in his hand. His sight was dimmed by the sudden change from the outer glare to the inner gloom. He brushed his hand across his eyes, looked again, then snapt his rifle to his shoulder.

"So there you are!" he exclaimed. "Confound you, but I admire your nerve! What are

you doing here?—and where did you get the woman?"

He recognized in Johnny Cox the companion of the man in the red woollen cap; and at the same instant Cox saw in the trapper the traveller whom he and his dead comrade had met in the woods and had tried to overtake, under cover of night, with the intention of robbing him. Cox suspected that this man had encountered the Canadian, Francis Dorian, and taken part in the blind musketry fight that had proved so disastrous to the gentleman in the red woollen cap.

John Jones said that he admired the other's nerve. Cox had cheek, but very little nerve. He sat now with a colourless face, gazing at the rifle. His mouth was open, but empty. By sudden fear he was bereft alike of the power to reason and the power to speak.

Kate laughed, and flashed her eyes at John Jones.

"Why for d'ye point the gun at him?" she asked. "Sure, he bes a honest man, an' harmless as a dead swile."

"I beg to differ with you," replied John, without lowering the rifle or looking at the woman.

Kate regarded him curiously, without hostility.

Ignorant as she was, she saw that this man belonged not only to another part of the world than Labrador, but to another variety of the human race than the people of Labrador. In face and hands and voice she read some of the same signs that distinguished the Blessingtons from the humble folk of Fore-and Aft Cove. This masterful young man differed as greatly in appearance from Johnny Cox as he did from Two Mink Sam, the mountaineer Indian.

"He bes a honest young man, sir," she persisted, "an' he belongs to Fore-an'-Aft Cove."

"He doesn't look particularly honest," replied John; "and the last time I met him he was doing his best to commit murder and robbery."

"That wasn't me!" cried Cox weakly.

The New Yorker's lips curled scornfully.

"You're a liar," he said. And then, turning to old Two Mink Sam, who had continued frying bacon unconcernedly. "Just tie his hands fast, will you. I want to look into his affairs. He's one of the men I told you about, Sam, one of the fellows who tried to kill Dorian. A snowshoe thong will do. Sit still, or you'll get hurt!"

Two Mink Sam set the frying pan on the hearth,

grunted, took two caribou-hide thongs from a pair of rackets which stood in the corner, and tied one of them strongly around the sailor's wrists and the other around his ankles. Cox whined, pleaded, and lied, but made no resistance. He was a thorough coward. The woman grew pale, but she remained seated, and for the moment voiced no protest. She thought, planned, with desperate speed. She was bright enough in her own way. She knew, instinctively, that there was truth in what the stranger said about her lover; but she honoured the stranger no more for telling the truth than she despised Cox for his attempt at robbery. Attempted murder of course was a more serious matter. She did not doubt for a moment that Johnny had been up to some reprehensible tricks. Doubtless the money in his pocket belonged to other people, and had been taken from them by trickery and force; and doubtless his stories of the rich man who was to pay him more money for some mysterious information he had acquired in Fore-and-Aft Cove was a flagrant lie. These reflections put the matter of Johnny Cox as a husband in quite a new light. Praise the saints that the black fox-skin was still in her own pack! But what was she to do?

She felt that fate had used her very unkindly. It looked as if sticking to Johnny now would be a desperate case of sticking to a sinking ship. This stranger seemed to know what he was talking about, and he had a masterful way with him. She felt that she had made a grave mistake in breaking so suddenly with the trader. He, too, was a masterful man—masterful even with his schooner resting on the bottom of the harbour. Perhaps she had been too hasty even in double-crossing Bill Sprowl. She had surely let Johnny's pocketful of money and glowing stories of "up-along" make a fool of her. One thing she saw clearly, and this was that Johnny Cox was a broken reed. What was she to do, poor girl? It was out of the question for her to return to the cove before the excitement of her departure in company with Johnny Cox and the fox-skin had cooled a little. Her only hope of getting even with mischance lay in the stranger. So she hid her face in her hands and began to cry.

John Jones, who had been whispering into the Indian's ear, turned at the sound of her stifled sobs, which were as natural as life. He stepped close to where she sat and looked down at her bowed head with an expression that was both

amused and cynical on his clean-shaven wind-tanned face.

"Oh, cheer up," he said. "Who are you, anyway?—and what are you crying about? You ought to be thanking me for showing you who this fellow is instead of sitting there blubbering."

He spoke at once airily and roughly to hide the uneasiness of his heart. Like most other men, he hated like the devil to see a woman cry. Kate did not answer him. She seemed to be struggling bravely with her sobs and tears. And so she was, but the struggle was to produce them, not to stifle them.

"Are you married to this fellow?" he asked.

Kate shook her head. Her graceful shoulders heaved convulsively.

"That's lucky," he said. "You've been badly fooled, it seems, but if you are not married to him you can go home. Fore-and-Aft Cove, I think you said. Where is that? If it's not too far, I'll take you there myself."

"She don't want to go home!" cried Johnny Cox. "She wants to go wid me, out o' this country entirely. We bes old sweethearts, me an' Kate Dormer. Bain't that the trut', Kate?"

At that she lifted her tear-stained face to the

stranger. Oh, yes, she was a good-looker—and she had very fetching eyes and knew how to use them. Her skin was very white and her cheeks were pink. She had Irish eyes, and the tears that now filmed them did not dim them.

"I don't want to go wid him," she whispered brokenly, appealingly. "I don't want to go wid him—an' I bes afeared to go back home."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the man from up-along.

"My men-folk, sir," replied the young woman. "Sure, they'd be the deat' o' me, for runnin' away wid Johnny Cox there."

That statement was too much for Mr. Cox. He uttered a wild and derisive yelp of laughter.

"I give the old man twenty dollars, an' he was desperate glad to be done wid her," he said.

"Oh, you shut up!" exclaimed John Jones. "I don't take any stock in what you say. I've seen you try to murder men in their sleep."

Kate reverted to her snuffles and tears, and Cox gazed dejectedly at the thongs that bound his wrists.

"I bes desperate hungry," said Cox at last.

"Let him eat," said the trapper, who stood in the open door, staring out at the wet and sunlit

wilderness. Two Mink Sam untied the leather from Cox's wrists and set the bacon out on tin plates. He poured the tea. Cox took up a knife and fork and went to work. Kate was hungry, too. She resisted the temptation for a few minutes, then went over to the table and began to eat. John Jones gazed out at the river, wondering what he was to do with these two. The woman should be sent home, of course, and the man should be held and the police notified. He did not doubt that the fellow was a notorious criminal and badly wanted by the authorities. He wondered, though, that he had turned out to be a native of this cove—and he wondered why he and the fellow in the red woollen cap had made two attempts to murder and rob Francis Dorian the courier.

Kate and Johnny Cox ate and drank in silence, each thinking hard over some plan of action that would best suit the case of each. Cox saw that the woman had no intention of sticking to him. At last Cox pushed his plate away from him, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and spoke.

"Ye bes a stranger to these parts, sir, as a blind dog could see widout lookin' twice, an'

maybe ye'd like to know the trut' about what brought me into this country overland from Canada," he said.

"The truth," said John Jones, turning in the door and eyeing the speaker ironically. "I'm afraid there's not much chance of hearing the truth from you."

"I'll tell it to ye, anyhow," replied Cox, unabashed. "If ye happens to come from New York, sir—an' that bes what I t'inks—then 'twill interest ye desperate."

"Why do you think I come from New York? What do you know of New York?" asked John.

"I's been there, sir—an' seen gentlemen like yerself there—an' there bes a gentleman i' Fore-an'-Aft Cove, a-hidin' there these six years back—what comes from New York, too. 'Twas him—what calls himself John Blessington—I come to see. Aye, sir, 'twas him I was sent for to see, an' paid good money for the job."

"Tell your story," said the trapper, leaning against the door-frame and lighting a cigarette.

Johnny Cox filled his pipe and began to tell—and a great deal of what he told was the truth. It seems that he had been talking about the rich gentleman who was building a house in Fore-and-

Aft Cove (this in a saloon down near the water-front of New York), when a thin-faced man who didn't look like a sailor began to buy drinks for him and ask him questions. At last the thin-faced man gave him ten dollars and invited him to accompany him to another part of the town, on important business. Johnny went, for he was drunk enough to venture anywhere. He was taken to a fine room in a very high building and questioned by a very large man in a fancy vest, across a leather-topped table as wide as the deck of a fore-and-after. He was asked all about his native place and about the gentleman from up-along who had built a house there. Johnny's truthful answers seemed to give the questioner a great deal of satisfaction. The large gentleman remarked to a companion that there was something in it as sure as two and two make four. He also remarked that no man had ever fooled him for six years on end before, and that it was a queer thing that this fellow should turn up (meaning Mr. Cox) within ten days of the letter from the fellow in Quebec. Then he gave Cox a hundred dollars, and told him that more would be given him in Quebec, and more still if he did what he was told to do. The thin-faced

man took Johnny north, not to the city of Quebec but to a little village out in the woods. Johnny and a Frenchman in a red woollen cap were given instructions by the thin-faced man and another. They were told to go north, and wait at a certain place, and rob a man with a team of five dogs. Pierre, he of the red cap, knew this man by sight. Pierre was in charge of this part of the business. They were to rob the courier, even if they had to kill him. If they failed in this on the out-trip they were to do it when the courier was on his way back to the settlements. As soon as this was done they were to return to the village and get their reward; but should they fail to obtain the courier's letter-bag they were to go on to Fore-and-Aft Cove and Johnny Cox was to obtain a specimen of Mr. Blessington's penmanship. Great would be his reward. Well, he and Pierre had failed to get the courier's mail-bag. They had suffered the worst of luck—had gone hungry, and cold—and at last Pierre had been shot. Johnny, all alone, had succeeded at last. He had reached the cove, had obtained an old letter written by Mr. Blessington, and was even now waiting for the opening of navigation, that he might return to the large man in New York and

obtain his reward for work well and laboriously done.

"So ye see, mister, I bes a honest man workin' for the police," concluded Johnny Cox.

"You are a sneak and a knave, willing to murder a man for a few hundred dollars," retorted the trapper. "What do you mean by saying that you are working for the police? Is this fellow who is paying you a police officer?"

"He bes a grand gentleman entirely," said Cox.

"What's his name?" asked John Jones.

Cox scratched his head. It was a pity that he had not learned the large gentleman's name, for this ignorance lessened his importance. Why had his employer not been more confidential? The only thing for him to do was to invent a name. He continued to scratch his head.

"You need not trouble yourself," said the man at the door, as if he had heard Johnny's thoughts. "I see that you are a liar, from top to bottom."

"I's told ye the trut'," said Cox; "but he didn't tell me his name."

The other turned to Kate, who had listened to her lover's story with keen interest and racking doubts.

"Will you come back to Fore-and-Aft Cove with me?" he asked.

"I's afeared to go back there," she said.

"Sam, can you look after both these people, and keep them here until I get back?" he asked the Indian.

Two Mink Sam nodded his head.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GENTLEMAN TRAPPER AND HANDS HAVE A MISUNDERSTANDING

Two Mink Sam explained the route to his partner and warned him against stepping into air-holes in the sodden ice. John gave his revolver to the Indian as a handy means of guarding the prisoners. Then John set out for Fore-and-Aft Cove to look into the mystery of the rich man with the big house, the charitable wife, and the daughter who dressed every evening in a silk gown. This last item of information had been given him by Kate Dormer. Perhaps this Blessington was an absconder? He was in hiding, anyway. John was keenly interested.

John walked gingerly on the grey ice, which already showed a ribbon of water along one shore. He made camp at sundown. Upon reaching the coast he took to the top of the cliff instead of to the shore ice. He was ignorant of the ways of the ice and did not intend to take any risks. So he laid his course along the

barrens, on or near the edge of the cliff, and this is why he did not meet Luke Cassin and young Whallen. The way was rough, and as the sun climbed the clear sky the heat of it told severely upon his endurance. He wished that his pack was not so heavy and that he had worn thinner clothing. "This," he reflected, "is the season of the year in which a young man's fancies are supposed to turn lightly to thoughts of love ; but it is also the time when skinnywoppers and three pairs of woollen socks feel dashed uncomfortable upon the feet, the sun causes little purple moons to swim across one's vision, a weakness attacks the knees and shoulders and 'tis easier and pleasanter to sit all day in a chair than to scramble up and down dripping hummocks and flounder across freshly-thawed bogs."

John was right. Though he was in the pink of condition he had to rest often, remove his cap and unfasten the neck of his coat and outer shirt; and all the while he puzzled over the mystery of the Blessingtons and wondered what he was to do with Johnny Cox. He gave hardly a thought to Kate Dormer. Everything that he had heard about the man who had built a big house behind Fore-and-Aft Cove and lived in it six years—a

house with a French cook, cellars for wines, hundreds of books, a billiard-room, a private mail communication with the world, and a butler —pricked his curiosity and tickled his sense of humour and his love of romantic adventure. The favourite authors of his youthful days (and he still read them sometimes) were Alexander Dumas the elder, Eugene Sue, and Robert Louis Stevenson. What would they have made of this man Blessington, he wondered. (He was still young, you see, and nothing sets the fancy to roaming along whimsical and heroic trails like walking alone through a sun-steeped wilderness.) To Dumas and Sue Blessington would have been a king in hiding or the richest man in the world retired and scheming some vast scheme, and to Stevenson he would have been a Scotch banker with a million or so of other people's money in his strong-box, and the fear of God and his victims in his quaking heart. John felt that Stevenson would have come closer to the truth than the great Frenchmen. And what would they have made of the girl who dressed every evening for dinner, in the great house of rocks and untrimmed timber, back of Fore-and-Aft Cove and a thousand miles, more or less, from

the nearest modiste? All three would have made a heroine of her, of course—beautiful, accomplished, and clever. It is likely that the Frenchmen would have made her unscrupulous and that Stevenson would have given her a heart of gold. John smiled as he made his own picture of her. He thought that he knew the breed. She was pretty, smart in her dress, and glib in her manner, shallow and discontented. She had gone to a fashionable school, no doubt. The daughter of a thief—but halt! Was not he himself the son of a thief? Her father had blundered, had been stupid enough to operate outside the protection of the law. Doubtless Blessington had been a banker in a moderate way of business, with no chance to do the trick legally.

Toward sundown he sighted a few thin streamers of smoke arising from the hidden hamlet and caught, across the humpy barrens, a red glint of sunlight on the windows of "The Folly". He had no intention of making his presence known immediately. He thought it would be amusing to do a bit of detective work. So he swung to the right, meaning to camp that night behind and out of sight of the house. As the dusk of evening fell his way became involved

among the ponds that dot that country almost as thickly as bubbles on the surface of a frying flapjack. Fortunately for him the spring twilight was long, and so he managed to maintain his general direction; but it was after nine o'clock when he made camp on the western slope of a hummock about half a mile behind Fore-an-Aft Cove. He was tired, and his spirit was depressed by the night and the solitude. He forgot the adventurous and romantic nature of his quest, and remembered only the heart-sickness and shame that had brought him to this far wilderness from New York. It is a bitter thing, I imagine, for a strong and honest man to feel shame for his father, shame for the very food that has nourished him, shame for the education, clothing, and luxuries that were paid for with shameful money. John's eyes had been opened wide to his father's methods. He was a hard student and a thinker, in spite of his well-trained muscles and love of the open. A hint or two had come his way; then a story in a newspaper; then a word from an earnest young man who had been at college with him. Then John had set himself to the task of investigating his father's methods with a view to disproving these hints and stories

and whispers. The result of his investigations had not been what he expected.

All this lay like a weight on John's mind and spirit. It was late when he fell asleep; but it was early when the chill of dawn awakened him to the fact that his camp-fire was nothing but a little mound of grey ashes and black coals, and that he had wriggled half-way out of his sleeping-bag. The night had been frosty and he was stiff with cold; but dawn was breaking beyond the sea and the adventures of the day called to him. His spirit felt better. In the grey dusk of the dawn he gathered dry twigs from the spruce-tuck, lit a small fire and cooked his breakfast. He accomplished all this in half an hour. Then he extinguished the fire, hid his pack, and set out for "Blessington's Folly," keeping to the valleys and hollows in his advance. The sun was out of the sea by this time. He carried his uncased rifle in his hand and moved quickly, a-tingle with a pleasant excitement. Presently he rounded the last hummock and came out on the edge of the wood-yard. The wide, squat house lay asleep, with blank windows and smokeless chimneys. The out-buildings—work-shops, store-houses, and barns—were shut and silent. The live-stock of

"The Folly" consisted of a small horse of the variety known as "Torbay nag," four head of cattle, half a dozen dogs, and poultry. Hay and grain for the nag and the cattle were imported from Newfoundland, at heavy expense.

John moved cautiously toward the house, keeping in cover of the wigwam-shaped stacks of firewood. A cock began to crow cheerily in the fowl-house. John, who was near the kitchen door by this time, turned toward the sound. At that moment the kitchen door opened and a violent hand seized him by the collar. John jumped and twisted so swiftly and with such vigour as to break the hold. To his amazement he stood face to face with Handy Hands.

"So it's you is it!" exclaimed Hands, in biting tones. And you told me that you'd come here by chance, to get away from the world."

"Well, I told you the truth—though what business it is of yours I can't see," retorted John. "But what are you doing here? You said you were going to Battle Harbour."

"So you came to spy on us, after all," said Hands. "You and those fellows who tried to murder our courier are accomplices in the same dirty game. You fooled me. I thought you were honest."

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded John violently. "Be careful what you say. I never set eyes on those fellows before—and I shot one of them."

"You can try to explain all that to my master," sneered Hands. "Now come along with me."

"Why, you miserable little liar, you told me you were a missionary—a man of God—and here you are in the service of this run-away banker, or whatever he is," cried John.

Hands darted at him, stung to the quick. John dropped his rifle, side-stepped, and put up his hands.

The ex-pugilist knew all the science and all the trickery of the game, was strong, in the pink of condition, and hardened in spirit and flesh by many encounters. John Blizzard was the younger of the two by ten years, the taller and the longer in the arms. He, too, was in the pink of condition (for his clean blood had healed the little puncture on his shoulder without a sign of inflammation), possessed of courage, a degree of science, and splendid muscles. During his four years at Yale, and afterwards, boxing had been his favourite winter exercise. One of his earlier instructors in the science had been Handy Hands,

the very person against whom he now found himself pitted in grim earnest in this far corner of the northern wilds.

Both were sportsmen, so they fought fair. Hands could deliver a punch at close quarters as heavy as the kick of a mule; but John's full-arm swings, right and left, were like the thrashing of a shark's tail. Both men were bitter. Hands thought that John was a spy—his father's spy, and John knew that Hands had lied to him.

The fight had been in progress exactly three minutes (though timed by no watch), when the French cook opened the door and looked out upon it. For a moment he thought that the butler and one of the men from the cove were engaging in a bit of horse-play, then he caught sight of the butler's face and saw the glint in the eyes and the blood on the square chin; and in the other fighter he beheld a stranger—a big stranger, fierce-eyed, bloody of knuckles, dancing, dodging, striking as if he intended to kill. His warm-hued face went as white as the lining of his own stew-pans. He flung his arms aloft and retreated, backwards, from the open door. He stumbled, fell into the arms of his assistant, and screamed the alarm. The servants came flying.

Breakfast was left to scorch and splutter on the range.

The combat in the yard continued. At the scream of the cook neither of the fighters had so much as blinked an eye-lid. Hands was cool but anxious. He had not intended to let the affair last more than half a minute—and many minutes had passed and it was still thrashing along. He must end it now—in a knock-out. This was undignified and quite unnecessary. The fact is, he had out-grown his taste for this sort of thing. It struck him now as being beastly and rather dirty. His years with the Blessingtons, as a confidential and trusted servant, had bred in him a distaste for bashing the face of his fellow-man. He had set out to settle this spy, this sneaking son of a sneak, with one punch, and behold, he was still punching! It must be finished immediately. Mr. Blessington would be here in a few minutes—perhaps the ladies, even. He did not want them to see him in this mix-up. He knew that he did not look his best with blood on his face and hell in his eyes. He must put this ex-pupil of his out of business within the next thirty seconds. Otherwise there was no saying what might happen,

for though he had delivered some nasty punches he had received some unpleasant jolts in return. His head was ringing a little and his wind was touched. He must end it now. Had he not been the world's champion middle-weight in his day?

A jab at the jaw went wrong—all wrong. He saved himself by some clever in-fighting, during which he jogged the younger man around the belt and ribs. Ha, that was better! But it could not have been perfect, else the spy would have been flat on his back. Bung! The ex-champion staggered and rocked and saw a rainbow in the sky. However, the spy also was staggering. Many a good blow went wide and wild. Hands tried to get close, where he could lean against his antagonist and use his wonderful half-arm jabs; but the other swayed clear of him and swung dangerously. Hands pulled himself together with a mighty effort, closed and punched, and at the instant of landing his punch he received a redoubtable bang on the side of his jaw. Down went John on his face. He groaned and rolled over on to his back. Then Handy Hands sank down peacefully beside him.

Mr. Blessington thrust his way through the

ring of men and women and found the fighters lying side by side. He called for cold water and brandy. Within twenty minutes Hands was tucked away in his own bed and John in that so recently vacated by Luke Cassin. Mr. Blessington and old Sol Mitch took charge of the cases. Their treatment was limited to cold-water bandages and brandy. Nothing was to be learned of the cause of the fight until one or other of the patients revived. The rifle in the yard told nothing. Mr. Blessington suspected that the stranger was none other than the man whom Hands had visited at the cabin of Two Mink Sam and pronounced honest and a gentleman. He did not look much like a gentleman now, poor devil, with his cut, puffed, discoloured, and bleeding face, bruised body, and raw knuckles; but neither did Hands look much like an ex-champion and the most respectable of superior, confidential butlers.

Mr. Hands was the first to return to consciousness and the power of speech. He opened his left eye and beheld the anxious face of his employer. He sighed, attempted a smile, and closed his eye.

"Not as quick as I used to be, sir. Very sorry, sir," he said.

"I am sorry, too," replied Mr. Blessington.

"You've been seriously knocked about, my dear fellow. I didn't think there was a man within two thousand miles of us who could get in at you like this. Who is your pugilistic friend, anyway —and where did you find him."

Hands opened his available eye again.

"That's young Blizzard," he said. "John Blizzard, sir—the same who is camping with Two Mink Sam, and who fooled me with his talk about running away from tainted money and making an honest living in the woods. That's the man, sir. I admit that he pulled my leg. Like sire, like son, I guess. I caught him spying around the house when I opened the kitchen door. I was mad, sir, I went right at him."

"So he was lying to you? He was a spy, after all—and not so innocent as he seemed. It looks to me as if they had run us to earth."

"If they were sure of us, sir, they wouldn't be sending spies; so we're safe to carry on, sir, so long as no spy that gets in here gets out again. We must keep this fellow, sir, and try to capture that man Cox. The third is dead—and it beats me, sir, to think why Blizzard shot one of his

own men. That looks to me like the dirtiest trick of all, sir."

"There is no dirtiness that a Blizzard will stick at to cover his tracks and gain his ends. One human life, more or less, means nothing to men of that kidney. You know how they threw lives away in South America. They could not ruin me except by ruining the country I had developed and served. They had to wreck governments to wreck my roads. Thank heaven I warned the boys in the last mail we sent out. I told them that our courier had been attacked. . . . We need six months more, at least. That fellow Cox must be found and brought back. . . . I wonder if H. P. will send the police up here, when his spies fail to return?"

"That would just about settle our game, sir—unless the trick can be turned in South America before then."

"We can't hurry that. The boys are working slowly but surely. Tom thinks that it cannot be pulled off before next winter. We must have a bloodless turn this time—and that means that we must have the trust and good will of all the people, and a great deal of money. All our work has to be done in the dark. We have the poor already

on our side—and in this case they represent the country. . . . We must keep our secret until winter, at all costs."

John Blizzard was given the best of everything. As soon as he was able to sit up and take notice, Mr. Blessington ceased visiting him, leaving him to the sole care of Sol Mitch. Blizzard was able to sit up in an arm-chair on the evening of the second day after the fight. His face was discoloured and puffed, his neck was stiff and his ribs were sore. He sat by the window, looking seaward through the clear spring twilight. He saw that the ice was adrift along the coast and that the outer sea was full of the Greenland floe —a grinding field of white, broken here and there by white hummocks and glinting bergs, filling the vision to the pale horizon. It was a wonderful sight, and suddenly between it and the window Jean appeared.

CHAPTER XIV

PRISONERS. THE CHASE OF JOHNNY COX

John leaned forward in his chair. The girl glanced at the window as she passed, and for a fraction of a second the blue eyes encountered the eager and piteous regard of the brown eyes. John leaned back against his pillows. The expression of the girl's face had disheartened him more than the hammering which he had received from Handy Hands. He could confront anger—even unreasonable and mysterious anger—with ready fists and undaunted spirit; but to read unfriendliness and scorn in the eyes and face of a girl—of a beautiful girl—whom he had never seen before in all his life, dropped his heart like a stone. This was a more formidable thing than the unreasoning enmity of the man who had smoked his cigarettes, and talked of old times, only a few days before in the cabin on Fox River. Hands was a liar, anyway, and evidently in hiding from the police. Confound

Hands! This girl was a very different proposition! She was a woman; and no man with an ounce of self-respect in him likes to have a strange woman look at him as if she despised him. It is against human nature. It is at once an insult, an injury, and a heart-rending comment on one's appearance or reputation. It is the height of injustice—and therefore the depth of cruelty. If the woman happens to be old and ugly it is bad enough, but if she is young and attractive it is an hundred times worse. And what right had this girl to despise him? Even if she knew who he was, and was familiar with his father's business methods, she had no right to look at him like that. Women have no right to judge men by their fathers. And what of her own father's business methods? He leaned his sore head against the pillows and felt that he had not a friend in the world.

Alfred Hands hobbled into the room five minutes after Jean had passed the window. He looked at John distantly and coldly, yet politely, with his one available eye.

"I hope that you are comfortable, Mr. Blizzard," he said.

John glared at him. All the bitterness that

Jean's glance had awakened in him surged up into his mouth.

"I am not comfortable," he said, "and I'm afraid I must trouble your master to have me moved down to one of the houses in the cove. I will pay. Can I be moved before dark?"

"I am sorry that you are not comfortable," said Hands quietly. "I have been slightly indisposed, and so was unable to attend to my duties. I am sure Sol Mitch did his best for you, and I know that Mr. Blessington waited on you with his own hands. What can I do for you?"

"I am greatly obliged to Mr. Blessington for his kindness and deeply regret having put him to any trouble," replied John bitterly. "Will you be so good as to tell him so and ask if I may be removed immediately? I feel quite well enough to be moved."

"I'm afraid that you will have to put up with the discomforts of this house for some time to come, Mr. Blizzard," said Hands. "May I sit down? I feel a bit flappy still. Thank you, sir. What would you like for dinner?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded John.

"To be quite frank with you," replied the butler, "you must enjoy Mr. Blessington's poor hospitality until he is ready to let you go. You came here, all the way from New York, to spy on us; and now, by heaven, you'll stay until we think it safe to let you go. You are a prisoner. That's the long and the short of it."

"And you are a liar," retorted the would-be trapper.

"It will do you no good to be abusive," said the butler. "You have called me a liar, and I have called you a liar and a spy. I caught you in the act. But we don't gain anything by going on abusing each other. I, for one, am willing to be polite, Mr. Blizzard. What will you have for dinner, sir. I have my orders that you are to receive every attention. We have some sound wines in the cellar—a claret, in particular, that I can recommend highly."

John glared, enraged and bewildered. They held him a prisoner, did they?—and offered him sound wines?

"I don't want any dinner," he snapped, "but I demand an explanation. What did you mean by attacking me? What right or reason have you for keeping me here against my wish?"

"You can answer those questions yourself," replied Hands. "You fooled me once, but I'm never fooled twice by the same trick or the same trickster. You should thank your stars that you are dealing with a gentleman."

"Meaning yourself, I suppose?" queried the other sneeringly.

"I refer to Mr. Blessington."

"I feel sure that the term does not apply to your employer. Who the devil is he, anyway, and what's he doing here? What bank did he rob?"

"That won't go down with me. You can't pull my leg again."

John Blizzard got slowly and painfully to his feet. His face was a picture of wrath, lacerated pride, bruised flesh, and bewilderment. The butler, noting his intention and anxious to avoid a second fight, hobbled toward the door. John stood, swaying weakly, and raised his right hand painfully from his side.

"Clear out!" he cried. "Damn you, clear out of this, or I'll be the end of you. Get out—and tell your master that I want to see him, damn him. I demand an explanation."

Hands slipped out of the room and locked the door behind him.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered. "He has no conscience—no sense of shame. Blizzard right to the dirty soul of him. But he can use his fists. It beats the devil how he can use his fists! And he fights fair."

John returned painfully to his chair. His rage slowly cooled, and anxiety sprang to being among the ashes. This was commencing to look serious—unpleasantly serious. Who were these people?—and what had they done?—and how far dared they venture to go in protection of the secret of their hiding-place? The case was evidently a desperate one; and he suspected that a desperate criminal would be capable of using desperate measures in defence of his freedom.

"I'll be lucky if they don't cut my throat, or poison me," he reflected dismally. And he thought of the girl, remembering the aloof unfriendliness of the blue eyes, the scorn of the red lips.

"She had no right to look at me like that," he murmured. "Damn it all, she had no right!"

Sol Mitch brought him his dinner on a tray a yard long. John had not seen such a dinner, and such china and silver, since leaving New York. He wanted it, but at last he turned his back,

leaving it untasted. It was not for fear of poisoning that he refused it, but because of a childish, stinging anger against the girl. Half an an hour later Sol Mitch returned and carried the loaded tray away without anything more in the way of comment than a grunt.

Alfred Hands visited the prisoner again that evening, shortly after nine o'clock. He brought a large bowl of beef-tea with him. John drank the stuff in silence, hungry but ungracious.

"Is there a man named Peter Dormer in the village?" he asked.

"Yes," said Hands, with a gleam of interest in his open eye.

"Tell him that he had better go up Fox River, to Two Mink Sam's place, if he wants to find his daughter," said John. "I intended to mention it before, but the treatment I've received from you and that sneaking Blessington has driven it out of my head until now."

Hands did not think it worth while to take exception to the wording of the information.

"Is she alone?" he asked. "Think again! She's not alone!"

"As a matter of fact, she's not alone," replied John, icily. "She's in the company of a friend

of yours from the cove—of an unhung thug by the name of Cox. He tried to murder me not very long ago. This part of the world seems to attract a queer collection of people. Tell Dormer that he'll find his daughter, and your friend Cox, in the care of my partner, Two Mink Sam."

"That won't go down," retorted Hands. "The fellow is one of your spies. What are you trying to give me now?"

"One of my spies?" sneered John. "Then if Cox is one of my spies I shot my other spy with my own hands."

"I guess a Blizzard would murder his own brother if it served his purpose," said the butler. "No, that story won't go down."

This was too much for John's tortured temper.

"Then see if this will go down," he cried, snatching up the empty bowl and hurling it at the butler's head. The effort caused a slash of hot pain to shoot up his neck and down his ribs; but the bowl found its mark and flew into a dozen fragments against the butler's discoloured brow. Hands cursed and retired. John Blizzard sank back against his pillows, fairly sweating with outraged pride and a sense of absolute, bewildering, infuriating injustice.

Hands went straight to Mr. Blessington and told the story for what it was worth. His own opinion was that it was not worth anything. Mr. Blessington was inclined to agree with him, but felt that nothing should be left undone that might lead to the capture of Johnny Cox. He pointed out the fact that Blizzard knew Kate Dormer and Cox to be together showed that there was some truth in his statement.

"Yes, sir, enough truth to lead us on a wild-goose chase," said Hands.

In spite of dozens of dissuasive arguments on the part of Alfred Hands, Mr. Blessington set out for Fox River at dawn, to investigate John Blizzard's statement. He was accompanied by two fishermen from the village, to carry the grub, tent, and blankets. Blessington himself carried a rifle and a flask. They expected a wet trip, as all the sea ice was moving and breaking and all the streams were running and the swamps and bogs thawed deep. Jean accompanied the party for a distance of four or five miles. Her father told her of his anxieties and fears. She cheered him up.

"If the boys need six months more to mature their plans in, then we must see that they have

them," she said. "We must catch this Johnny Cox and imprison him with the Blizzard man, and we must see that the trader does not go away; and every stranger who shows his nose here during the summer must be kept here until Tom and Will have worked their trick on those robbers out in the world. I think we should organize the men of the cove into a force to patrol the coast and the country on our flanks and rear."

"And what shall we do when he sends the police in to find out what has become of his spies?" asked her father. "We can't detain the police."

"I don't think H. P. Blizzard can afford to employ the police," said Jean. "I am sure that we shall have to deal with nothing more formidable than spies and private detectives."

Jean turned back, and her father went on toward Two Mink Sam's cabin in better spirits.

It was well past noon of the next day when Mr. Blessington and his men reached the cabin on Fox River. They found Sam seated on a box beside the open door, smoking. He grunted a salutation, but did not speak or move. Inside the cabin they found Kate Dormer. At sight of Mr. Blessington she began to cry. The men

lowered their packs to the floor and gazed wonderingly at Kate. Blessington went over to her and took her hands gently from her face.

"Where is Johnny Cox?" he asked.

Kate managed to quiet her sobs and tell him. Johnny had gone that very morning. For days he had offered money to the old Indian for his freedom, his rifle, and some food; but, until that morning, Sam had not allowed himself to be bribed. The truth is, Sam had held out until he lost hope of his partner's return; then, at a loss to know what to do with the fellow, he had taken the money and let him go, with a grunt for a blessing. The old man had even asked the girl to clear out too—but she had refused to share the fortunes of her old admirer another moment. She felt sure that the stranger, Sam's partner, would return in time, and she meant to be there to receive him when he appeared. It was in her mind that this distinguished stranger was a much better proposition than anything she had seen yet. But Johnny Cox, the rascal, had gone away. She made a heart-breaking story of the way Cox had treated her, and so excited Mr. Blessington's pity. He had headed for the coast, intending to go north and wait for the coastal boat.

"I'm glad to hear that. Luke Cassin will get him," said Blessington.

He was puzzled by the woman's story; puzzled to know what of it was true and what false, and what it meant if it were true. According to Kate, Blizzard and Cox were enemies. Blizzard had threatened the other with his rifle, accused him of attempted murder and robbery and made a prisoner of him. Unfortunately for John Blizzard, Kate told only what she had seen (and a little that she had imagined), and nothing of the truth which Cox had told Blizzard about himself. It may have been loyalty to her one-time lover, or a sort of crooked and sly discretion, that kept Kate silent on this vital matter. However that may be, Mr. Blessington heard nothing of it. He was tired, and he firmly believed that the fugitive would run into the arms of Luke Cassin; so he decided to make camp right where he was until the following morning and told the men to pitch the tent and hang on the tea-kettle.

In the meantime, Bill Sprowl was enjoying one of the exciting times of his life. After his encounter with Luke Cassin, several days before, he had hurried home and, in the very act of outfitting for the trip up the river, in search of Kate

and Johnny Cox, he had let an iron pot fall on his moccasined foot. Though no bones were broken, the right foot was so seriously bruised that he was housed for three days. At last he got away, with his pack and his rifle, and with a thirst for vengeance upon Johnny Cox stinging in his throat. The ice of the river was running by this time, crowding seaward in spinning pans and broken slob, to mix with the slow drift of the shore-ice or be hurled up upon the landwash by the grind of the Greenland floe. Bill started up stream, threading his way among the rocks and stunted thickets of the right bank of the river and limping a little, at first, on his sore foot. The sun was high and warm, for he had made a late start. He travelled slowly, picking his way with care and lifting his right foot high and setting it down gingerly. He made poor progress. He had lost so much time that now a few more hours did not seem to matter, one way or the other. It was early in the afternoon when he first caught sight of Johnny Cox on the other side of the river.

The pans of drifting ice were crowding thick at this point. Bill Sprowl forgot his sore foot. He halted for a moment and gazed across at the other shore. Cox was alone, making all haste down

stream. Where was Kate Dormer? What had the dirty sneak done with Kate? Bill dropped his pack from his shoulders, let it lie where it fell, ran down the bank and sprang out upon one of the drifting ice-cakes. He had hunted seals on loose ice, and was a past-master at the art of "copying," or ice-running. It was his intention now to "copy" across to his enemy's side of the river and settle the old score and the new without loss of time. He crossed the first cake in one stride and sprang from it to the second. The second happened to be a small cake, so he alighted fairly in the middle of it; but even so, it sank and slanted sluggishly beneath his weight and he was forced to jump quick for the next. And it was then that Johnny Cox caught sight of him recognized him, and read his intention in the blink of an eye.

Bill had to give all his attention to the river just now, for the swollen current ran swifter toward mid-stream and the ice was lively and deceptive. For a little while, intent upon traversing that gliding, grinding plane, his mission was forgotten. Every sense, every nerve, every muscle gave itself to the work of selecting the safe ice and detecting the masses of slob, of timing the

drift of the desired foothold to the fraction of a second, of measuring the jump and making it, of choosing the course and holding it, of springing clean and alighting true—all at once and all as quick as thought or sunlight. Bill was equal to the hundred swift demands, for though he had not often run the river ice he had more than once raced for the harbour against death and an off-shore wind, across a scattering floe.

Johnny Cox had halted at the sight of Bill Sprowl leaping toward him across the running ice. Cox was a desperate man—and a coward. He cleared his rifle from its woollen case, brought it to his shoulder and fired. For all his desperation and lack of human conscience, the ex-sailor was a shockingly poor marksman. And he was ignorant of the mechanism of his weapon. He had the vaguest ideas concerning the purpose and management of the back-sight. The bullet flew high.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHASE CONCLUDED. THE FIRE AT "THE FOLLY"

THOUGH the bullet flew high and wide, the report of the rifle brought Bill Sprowl's attention back to his mission and his enemy. And then the real excitement began. Bill saw his rival with the smoking rifle still at his shoulder, paused for a second on the block upon which he had just alighted, glanced up stream and spotted a big and steady-riding pan, snapt a cartridge from the magazine into the breech and, as the fugitive's second shot rang out, jumped for the next fleeting foothold.

The second bullet flew as high as the first. Bill copied the slob ice, with nimble feet that skimmed and fled as if winged, and won to the big, steady-riding pan that he had decided upon ten seconds before. It sank a little and wallowed a little, when first encountered by his weight; but he took the exact centre of it, caught his

balance, braced his feet and sniped at Johnny Cox. He threw the bolt, pulled it back, slid it home and fired again. Both shots must have gone somewhere near the mark, for Cox turned and ran for the cover of an outcrop of rocks. Bill immediately crossed the big pan and sprang out again upon the drifting slob. Cox fired from cover. It was evident that he had lowered the backsight, for the bullet passed within three or four yards of Sprowl—still a little too high and a great deal too wide. The trapper made no attempt to return the shot, but continued his perilous race for shore. His feet were soon upon sodden, dripping ice-cakes that had run aground in shallow water and piled high along the shore. The water, and now the strong sunshine, had honeycombed these to the heart. The edges of these uneven steps crumbled beneath Bill's feet as he scaled the barrier, and he fell twice before reaching the top. As he sprawled flat the second time, half on the rotten ice and half-wet earth of the bank, another report clanged from the rocks. It was a close thing this time; and Bill pulled his rifle to him and fired in reply, quick as thought from where he lay. Then he scrambled to his feet and dashed straight at his enemy's position.

It was a fortunate thing for Bill Sprowl that Johnny Cox was a bad shot; and it was equally fortunate for Sprowl that Cox was a coward. The ex-sailor forsook his cover of rocks at the other's reckless and vigorous advance and fled along the top of the bank, heading down river. Bill gave chase, at top speed, for two hundred yards or so; but the passage of the river had touched his wind and so he was forced to halt, staggering and gasping with temporary fatigue. He brought his rifle hastily and unsteadily to his shoulder and sniped at his fleeing rival. It was a wild shot and only served to make Cox redouble his desperate efforts toward escape. Bill sank to his knees, the better to rest, and panted like a dog, and the form of Johnny Cox continued to recede in the middle-distance, sometimes shut off entirely from the trapper's sight, for a moment or two, by an inequality of the ground.

Bill rested for five minutes, then stood and took a deliberate aim at the jogging figure far in front, and pressed the trigger as calmly as if his sights were aligned upon a bear or caribou. It was a long and difficult shot; but from the haste which the fugitive made to veer to the left and so bring a rocky hummock between himself and his pur-

suer, it was evident that it had not gone very wide of the mark. Bill grunted and advanced at an even and servicable pace. As he ran he thanked his patron saint that his last shot had been no more successful. He did not want to kill Johnny Cox, for he knew that such a deed would give him a bad name on the coast and put him on the wrong side of Mr. Blessington's favour. In fact, he remembered that the trader had charged him particularly not to kill the man—had told him that Mr. Blessington wanted the man alive, and even uninjured, if it could be managed. He saw that he had taken a grave risk with that last shot, the distance and conditions having been such that even the finest marksman in the world could not have been sure of winging the fugitive without causing a mortal mischief. And Bill, though a good shot, knew that he was not the finest in the world.

Cox presently appeared again, running heavily, turning a pale flake of face frequently over his shoulder. Bill gained on him with every stride. The fugitive continued to carry his pack, afraid to discard it in that ungenerous wild. In addition to this handicap of weight, he was forced to keep to the course of the river by the condition of the

country. He saw that his only hope of escaping the persistent trapper lay in an accident of some sort to the pursuer or in a lucky shot with the rifle. He had plenty of ammunition. He turned and dropped behind a rock, when Sprowl was within a hundred yards of him, and opened fire. The third shot sent Sprowl to cover. Now neither could see the other. A little hawk, wheeling high against the blue, was the only sign of life. The sun beat strongly down upon the wet earth. The echoes of the rifle-shots died away, leaving no sound in the wilderness save the slobbering of the ice-weighted river. This was a desolate sound. The clear sunshine, the gleam of it on wet rock and moss, and the voyaging hawk against the wet blue of the sky, were desolate things to behold. The fugitive drew and exhaled his breath with a precaution that was as useless as it was uncomfortable. Panic had him at the heart. The sweat of exertion that bedewed his skin now turned as cold as ice from fear. He had no doubt in his mind but that Sprowl intended to kill him because of the girl. He raised his head a little, very cautiously, and took a hasty survey of the rough ground which lay between him and the spot

where Sprowl had taken cover. He turned and commenced crawling slowly away, slanting a little toward the sodden and partially flooded marsh on his left. His pack was still on his back and he glanced over his shoulder once for every yard of ground gained. It was slow and trying work, and his heart felt as if it were flapping in his breast like a wounded bird. He reached another place of cover at last and turned again. Still there was no sign of life in the wilderness other than the wheeling hawk high up in the blue, and still the only sound was that of the slobbering, burdened river. He turned again and continued his unhappy and perilous journey, still crawling with his belly to the wet earth and rocks like the serpent of Holy Writ. He continued to veer slightly into the marsh, thinking thus to give his pursuer the slip and perhaps even obtain an easy shot; but he was haunted by the unnerving suspicion that the eyes of his enemy were upon him—that the rifle might speak, and the bullet strike him to death, at any moment. This breath might be his last! This very breath might become a whistling death-rattle in his throat! So intense was his terror now that he could not will himself to turn his

head and survey the line of his desperate retreat. At last he gained another cover of granite and spruce-tuck and turned again. And still his pursuer made no sign in all that world of empty sunlight and soaking barren.

Thus a couple of miles were travelled by Johnny Cox, yard by yard, belly to the ground, in short stages from cover to cover; and still Sprowl had made no sign. The hawk had vanished from the sky, leaving it empty, but the river continued to slosh and slobber along its flooded banks, driving and grinding and churning its freight of ice. The fugitive was possessed suddenly by a wild hope, as he knelt in the wet moss and gazed around him. *Had the last of those three shots hit his enemy?* The chances for it were good. Sprowl had doubled-up and run for cover. He had taken cover—and he had not been seen since. Winged perhaps, perhaps hit in the body. It was a heartening thought, and with the up-leap of hope, fear vanished.

"To hell wid him!" muttered the fugitive. "Sarves him right. Sure, I hopes he got it plunk t'rough the vitals, the dirty squid. 'Twill larn him not to go gunnin' after a lad like meself agin,

divil take him! I guess he bain't in no shape to go a-courtin', anyhow."

He got to his feet, brave with the thought that his enemy and old rival was even now in a fair way of becoming fox meat. He took a last look around, then rearranged his pack and set out briskly toward the coast, slanting in gradually toward the higher and drier ground along the river. He had gone several hundred yards in this fearless manner when his senses were suddenly outraged by the report of a rifle from a little on his left and a considerable distance to his rear. For a second he stood stock still in his tracks, with hope salty on his tongue like ashes, and fear gripping again at heart and throat. And then a wild panic seized him and he ran without once turning his head. For twenty yards or so he ran straight, and swifter than he had ever run before. Then the rifle cracked again and the bullet came whining past. He began to dodge as he ran, but still he ran, too panic-stricken to drop and take cover. Again the rifle spoke. The bullet knocked up a tiny, instantly-vanishing feather of grey dust from the crown of a granite boulder on the right. The trapper was shooting in earnest, but the range

was long. Another shot—and it seemed to Cox that a giant fist smote him with gigantic force on the right shoulder. He was hurled to the ground, face down, but fortunately for his ugly face the ground was soft in that spot. He was breathless. For ten seconds or so he believed himself to be killed—or mortally wounded at least. But when his lungs filled again and he discovered power enough remaining to lift his face from the mud, he sat up, dazed and fearful. His pack, jerked loose by his tumble, now slid around and sagged upon his heaving chest, and he saw where Sprowl's bullet had struck the upper right-hand corner of the pack, where the frying-pan was stowed, and glanced up and off. He had received the blow of the bullet without the bullet, thanks to the frying-pan. His dazed wits at last grasped the fact that he was uninjured, whereupon he staggered to his feet, swung his pack behind him and picked up his rifle. He was straightening himself, rifle in hand, when he caught sight of Bill Sprowl. The trapper was within fifty yards of him, running on a limping foot.

"Drop that gun, or I'll shoot the stinkin' heart out o' ye!" cried Sprowl. And he meant it. He was mad—recklessly mad—and determined to

take Cox to the cove, dead or alive. He had hurt his sore foot when dashing for cover from the fugitive's last three shots, and had been forced to creep and scramble to keep in touch with his quarry. In fact he had thought, more than once, that he had lost him. This, and the pain in his foot, had sent his temper splintering. When, after those miles of creeping and uncertainty, he had seen Cox arise suddenly into view and walk briskly away, he had chosen his ground, knelt, wept the sweat from his eyes, adjusted the back-sight of his rifle and commenced shooting with the grim intention of bringing Cox to earth, dead or alive.

Yes, Sprowl meant what he said. Even a fool would have seen it. Cox let his rifle fall to the moss at his feet.

They made camp within a few yards of the place of the capture. Cox did the work, while Bill sat near at hand, with his pipe in his mouth and his rifle across his knees. Cox told of his capture by the stranger in the old Indian's camp and of Kate's refusal to share his misfortunes another minute; and, after a little persuasion on Bill's part, he admitted that Kate had carried the fox skin away from the cove with her and that it

was still in her possession. But Cox did not repeat the story that he had told to John Blizzard of his reasons for coming overland to the coast of Labrador. They rested all afternoon, and broke camp at the first lift of dawn. They travelled slowly, because of Bill's foot. They arrived at "The Folly" after dark and half an hour after the return of Mr. Blessington and his men. Kate Dormer had refused to accompany Mr. Blessington. She intended to remain in the cabin of Two Mink Sam until that tall stranger should reappear. Blessington had not told her that the stranger was enjoying an enforced visit at "The Folly".

Now there were two visitors at "The Folly". Johnny Cox was shut into a small room, fed, and allowed to retire. In the morning he was questioned and cross-questioned by Mr. Blessington and Hands. You may be sure that he told nothing of the truth. He lied desperately, and made the most of his old friendship and recent affair with Kate Dormer. He was taken into John Blizzard's room.

"You'll be pleased to see that we've got hold of your friend too," said Hands to John.

This was a serious mistake on the part of

Hands, for it enraged the New Yorker to the fighting point. Blizzard went blue with rage about the jaws. Johnny Cox trembled in his moccasins, sure that the other would tell the story which he (Cox) had confided to him up Fox River. To his astonishment and unspeakable relief, the man who had made him a prisoner in the distant camp did nothing of the kind. He arose slowly from his chair and advanced slowly but menacingly upon the butler. He was a daunting sight, with a bandage still across his face and his knuckles only half healed. Hands still sported a bandage, too. Hands withdrew a step, though his one serviceable eye shone with the light of battle.

"No more of that now, Mr. Blizzard," he said. "This is no time for it—and no place for it."

"I'll stand no more of your damned insults," replied John, "and I mean to shut you up, now, if I get killed for it. Put up your hands—or get out. Put them up, damn you! Put them up!"

But Hands refused to put them up. Mr. Blessington had given orders that there was to be no more fighting—and he knew that Mr. Blessington was standing just outside the door listening. The master of "The Folly" did not want to show

himself to young Blizzard, for fear that he might be recognized.

"I can't fight you," said the butler. "Let slam at me if you want to. Now's your chance—you big slob—when my hands are down."

John swore and went slowly back to his chair. He seated himself.

"Take that fellow out of my room," he said. "Take him quick—and don't bring him back."

Hands turned to Johnny Cox, who stood like one dazed by a sudden light. So this stranger didn't intend to give him away? This man knew his story—had heard it from his own lips—and did not mean to disclose it.

"You know this gentleman, I suppose?" queried Hands.

Cox denied it. He denied ever having seen Mr. Blizzard before, long and loud. Hands protested, and John listened in a scowling silence. At last Mr. Blessington whistled softly, and Hands removed Johnny Cox from the room and locked Blizzard's door on the outside.

"It's no use," said Mr. Blessington to Hands. "Every word he says is a lie. All we can do is keep hold of both of them—until we are ready to let them go. That other is too deep for me. It

seems that he told the truth about the girl at Sam's cabin; and unless she is a liar, too, he certainly did not act toward Cox like a fellow-spy. I find it difficult to believe that they are all liars."

"I caught Blizzard spying on this house, sir, after he'd lied to me," replied Hands. "They're all liars, or worse, sir."

"And yet I noticed that he did not strike you when you refused to put up your hands," said Blessington doubtfully.

"I taught him what he knows about that science, sir—and I taught him to fight fair," replied Hands.

John saw nothing more of Johnny Cox during the day, but Cox saw more than he wanted to of Mr. Hands. The fact is, Hands was determined to get a confession out of the ex-sailor. He questioned and he threatened, and Cox told old lies and new.

"You'll not see the outside of this house for a year," said Hands.

Mr. John Blizzard slept soundly enough until midnight, in spite of his sore muscles, his smouldering anger, and his indignation; but shortly after midnight he opened his eyes suddenly and

found himself wide awake and sniffing. He sat up in his bed and sniffed again. Smoke! He sprang out of bed and crossed the room to the small, pale grey square of the window. He could see nothing outside but misty star-shine. The room was warm—uncomfortably warm—and the smoke had become suddenly thicker. He pulled on his trousers and sweater over his pyjamas, and thrust his bare feet into the slippers which had been furnished to him by Hands. All this was done in a couple of minutes. He could find no sign of fire in the room, other than the stinging smoke. He went to the door, but of course it was locked on the outside. Returning to his bed, which was of iron, he threw the bedding on to the floor and deftly dismembered the bed-stead. Then, with one of the iron legs in his hands, he went back to the door, lit a match to ascertain the exact position of the lock and knob, swung, and struck. The knob broke off and went hopping across the floor at the first stroke. He struck again, setting screws and other small articles of hardware a-jangle. The sting of the smoke in his eyes and nose and throat grew stronger every second. He struck again, furrowing the wood with the square end

of the iron bar. The shattered lock fell to the floor with a clatter. He pulled the door open, jumped outside, and shouted the alarm.

Blizzard found himself in a dark and narrow hall, with the smoke thicker than ever in his face. He shouted twice, at the top of his voice, then advanced cautiously to the right, toward the centre of the rambling dwelling. He guided himself with his left hand upon the wall and held the leg of the bed in his right; and whenever his left hand discovered a shut door his right administered a crashing blow upon it with the iron. And he continued to shout. He had made about twelve paces, and crashed the alarm on five or six doors, when a door suddenly opened ahead of him, on the right, and the face of Alfred Hands appeared, indifferently illuminated by a candle. It was then, by that feeble candle-flame, John saw the smoke for the first time. It was thick enough to see. It made a halo of blue around the pointed flame.

"How the devil did you get out?" demanded Hands, sniffing and blinking. Dregs of slumber still dimmed his vision. "What's that smell?"

"Smoke, you blithering fool! The house is burning!" roared John.

"Smoke! Fire! God help us!" cried Hands, jumping into the narrow hall and tilting the candle at so wide an angle that the melted wax dripped upon his bare toes. For a second or two he peered up and down the hall. "Which way?" he asked.

"The smoke is thicker here than in my room," replied John. "Yes, and it's warmer here."

The butler thrust the candlestick into John's hand.

"Go right ahead! Get into the wing on the other side of the hall and dining-room, and wake the family," he said. "I'll get on a few togs and collect the servants. I'll follow you. Get a move on."

John hastened down the hall, opened the door at the end of it, and found himself in the wide, square, main-hall of the house. Against the glass of the windows he saw the flicker of red. The smoke hung thicker than ever here, like a fog along the low ceiling. From in front and overhead came a brisk crackling and a dull roaring sound. He ran across the apartment and flung open the door of the dining-room. Here, too, a menacing glow pulsed upon the windows, and the smoke hung thick and the sounds of drawing

flames and burning wood strengthened overhead. The roof of the main building (and perhaps that of the east wing) was burning. Again John shouted the alarm, ran forward and pulled open another door. He was in a narrow corridor now, and here the smoke swirled thick and the heat was intense. By the blanketed light of his candle he could see no farther than a yard or two ahead of him. He opened a door on his right, shouting with all the strength of his lungs. The smoke was choking-thick. He coughed violently and shouted again. He was answered by a moan from the cloudy darkness. He stumbled forward, overturned a chair, tripped upon a leather steamer-trunk and then against a bed. And in the bed lay a middle-aged man, blinking and gasping. John did not recognize him as anyone he had ever seen before, but knew him for the owner of the house. He dropped the bed-leg to the floor, grabbed Blessington by the shoulder, and dragged him out of bed.

"Your house is burning," he shouted. "Wake up! Get out! Where are the others?"

The smoke had drugged Blessington in his sleep. John saw a tin bath-tub at his feet and a bucket of cold water. He put down the candle,

picked up the bucket and sloshed its contents full upon Blessington's face and breast. Then, snatching up the candle, he dashed from that room, along to the next door and into the next room. He blundered his way to the bed. The smoke and heat were worse in this room than in the other and the roaring overhead was louder. He could hear the fire gnaw the rafters just beyond the low ceiling of plaster. His head was spinning now and his lungs aching. He extended the candle toward the head of the bed.

"Who's here?" he coughed. "Wake up!"

He saw the girl. She breathed heavily and her eyes were closed. At that moment the candle toppled out of the stick, fell to the bed, rolled to the floor and went out. John reached forward, clawed the bedding about the unconscious form and lifted all to his breast. Through a corner of the ceiling came a flicker of red. By that dim and fearful light he turned and stumbled toward the door, clutching the girl and her trailing and awkward draperies of quilts and sheets tight to his breast.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FALL OF "THE FOLLY"

JOHN BLIZZARD reached the door; and at the same moment a large flake of plaster and blazing laths crashed from the ceiling to the floor, and down through the hole, which opened upon a roaring orgy of flame, shot smoke and blazing splinters, and a blast of heat, and a scarlet tongue of destruction that licked far out along the ceiling. John shut his eyes, lowered his face against the slender shoulder of the girl in his arms, snatched a breath that hurt his windpipe like an inhalation of living flame and plunged for the open door. He struck his right shoulder against the edge of the door with the full weight of his plunge, reeled sidewise and fell, still holding the unconscious girl. The shock of the fall aroused her, and she opened her eyes for the first time since closing them in peaceful slumber several hours before. The room was now like the maw of a furnace—a pit of wavering red light

and swirling smoke. As she opened her eyes John scrambled to his feet, still clasping her firmly. She stared, dazed and horror-stricken, into the face so close to her own. She saw the firm chin, the bruised and discoloured flesh on cheek and brow, the wide eyes, staring straight ahead and red with the reflection of the fire. Dully she realized that it was the prisoner—the spy—John Blizzard, the son of the man who had ruined her family; but the heat and smoke had worked deep and her mind refused to deal with this problem—refused even to repudiate the absurdity of the sense of security that drove out the first shock of terror. She knew that she was in grave peril of fire—of death; her head span and throbbed and her throat and lungs ached; but she knew that she was safe. She choked for breath, sobbed, clasped her arms around John's neck and closed her eyes.

John reeled through the door and along the narrow passage. Shouts rang about him, now springing louder than the roar of the fire and the crash of falling timbers, now lost in the flood of menacing sounds. He tried to shout, but his voice cracked and failed on his parched lips. Flame showed everywhere, here in lurid blotches

through the smoke, there in darting tongues of yellow and red. John staggered forward, his shoulders stooped as if to shield the body in his arms, his head down and his lips against the quilt over the girl's shoulder. He collided with something, some one. It was Hands, who clutched at the figure in his arms, at the same time uttering an inarticulate cry of joy. He brushed Hands aside and staggered onward. The way out was by the main door of the main building. He knew this instinctively. In front, ahead of him, there was air to breathe. The agony of his lungs was almost unbearable. The cuts and bruises on his face and body felt as if they were singeing and broiling. The thin woollen slippers on his feet were burned to a crisp. Another figure reeled from the lurid murk in front of him, staggered against him, and clutched at the girl in his arms with a sob of joy. It was Blessington, her father. John did not relinquish his hold. He plunged ahead with a fine effort, shouldering Blessington from his path. He entered the big dining-room. The smoke was less dense here. The windows had broken and the red flames licked through them from the blazing outer walls. He crossed the dining-room and won to the wide

hall, with Blessington and Hands stumbling at his heels. A flame leapt suddenly to life upon the quilt that enwrapped the unconscious figure in his arms. He freed his left hand, sustaining her weight with one arm, by a mighty effort that wrung a groan from him, and beat out the flame.

"On! Don't stop!" gasped Blessington at his shoulder. "To the right. To the door."

He swayed. He was shoved from behind. He recovered his balance and dashed to the left, out of the house, out into the night—out into the clean, cool air of God's own night. He stumbled and sank to his knees. His arms relaxed. The power to hold flowed out of them like water. Strong arms supported him and his burden, but he let the girl slip from his embrace and fell beside her.

John Blizzard opened his smarting eyes upon a cool, thick darkness. He put up his hand, with difficulty, and felt that it was a wet bandage. He groaned, for he was full of pains and aches and an unmanning nausea. Something touched his arm gently.

"Are you in pain?" some one asked tenderly. It was a woman's voice.

"I feel—pretty bad—thanks," mumbled John.

"May I have a drink—of water. And—is the girl—safe?"

"She is safe and uninjured," replied the unseen woman. "I am her mother. You saved her life. We realize that. We realize that her father and Hands would have been too late. I—I do not know how to thank you—for my daughter's life—and for all of our lives. I think we would all have been smothered in that part of the house The fire was in the roof directly above us."

"I am glad," said John. "It was fortunate—that I have not been a heavy sleeper—since the morning Hands battered me up. I fell once—with your daughter. I am glad that she wasn't hurt."

"She was not hurt. She will be quite herself again in a few days," replied Mrs. Blessington. "Let me raise your head a little. Here is the water. I will hold it for you."

John drank deep, then lay back and fell into a half doze. Presently he spoke again, and again lifted his right hand to his bandaged eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You are in a tent," replied Mrs. Blessington. "The house burned to the ground. It is now almost noon. You have been unconscious, or

asleep, for eleven hours. Do you feel able to drink some beef tea?"

"Not just now, thank you," said John. "I feel a bit sea-sick—to be quite frank. But what is wrong with my eyes? Why are they bandaged?"

"The heat and smoke inflamed them," she answered. "But they have been thoroughly bathed, and my husband feels sure that they are not seriously injured. We were afraid—until we made a careful examination. Your eye-brows were singed, and even your lashes—and we feared that the eyes themselves may have suffered seriously. But I am glad to say that none of your injuries are serious. Your feet are blistered, and your left hand, as a result of rubbing out the flame on the quilt."

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble," said John sincerely.

He felt a soft hand on his wrist.

"My dear boy. My dear boy, you must not talk like that," said Mrs. Blessington unsteadily. "You—you came as an enemy—and saved us from death—at the risk of your own life. I am a woman—and a mother—and I cannot think of you as an enemy—after this."

"I don't understand it," replied John. "I

came here quite by chance—and met Hands, whom I used to know in New York—and he lied to me. I told him the truth—and he told and acted a lie. Then the run-aways came to our cabin—the man and the woman—and I spotted the man as a fellow who had given me some trouble in the woods. I made him a prisoner. He and the woman told me about the family here—the rich family—and the big house. Of course I was curious. I came here to investigate—but not particularly as an enemy. But when Hands appeared and grabbed me by the collar—and called me a liar and a spy—and an accomplice of the fellow I had shot and of the man I had left in bonds—well, I felt sore. I thought Hands was a missionary. He beat me up rather badly—and that made me feel a bit sore at the whole outfit—quite naturally, I think. I came here to get away from deceit and lies and trouble—not to mix in them. But when your daughter passed my window and looked at me—as she might look at a dog that she did not like—well, that filled me with bitterness. I had never seen her before—had never spoken to her—had never heard of her until I came to Fox River. And yet she looked at me as if—she despised and hated

me. That — that was worse than Hands' beating."

"But you admit that you are a son of H. P. Blizzard?" said the woman.

"Hands knows me—so it would be useless for me to deny it. But I came to the woods to—to get away from that name. I—I have lately made the discovery that—my father's business methods are—dishonourable. I could not turn him—so I came away. But I cannot understand with what harm to Hands—or to your family. Why do you think that I was associated with Cox? I am H. P. Blizzard's son—but what has my father to do with Cox—and with the fellow I shot?"

"Do you mean that you do not know my husband?"

"I met him last night—for the first time. I pulled him out of bed—and threw a bucketful of water over him."

"But you know who he is?"

"Only that his name is Blessington—and that he has lived here for a number of years. That is all—and I heard it from Kate Dormer. But I do know that he is mixed up in some underhand business—and that Cox was sent here to spy upon him. Cox told me so. I would have

warned Hands against Cox—if I had not been so badly treated."

"And you did not come to Fore-and-Aft Cove to spy upon us?"

"I have said it. Why should I come to spy upon you? I know nothing about you. If your husband is honest, I fail to understand—why you are so alert—and distrustful."

"I believe you," said Mrs. Blessington thoughtfully.

"In that case, I suppose I am no longer a prisoner," said John.

"I—I think we must urge you to remain with us—all summer."

John was silent for a long time. At last he said, "I suppose the only graceful thing for me to do is to accept your invitation. I intended to remain in this part of the world, anyway. I wonder if I may ask who you really are—why you are here—and what my father has to do with it? I think an exchange of confidences would clear the air—and I have done my part. You say that you believe me—therefore you must trust me."

"I do believe you," replied Mrs. Blessington. "I believe you are innocent—of everything that we blamed you for; and I know that we can never

repay you for what you did last night. I feel ashamed of the treatment that you have received. I beg your pardon—very humbly and sincerely—for my part of it. The others will feel shame too, and they, too, shall beg your pardon."

"You have done nothing, my dear lady," said John. "In fact you are the only member of the family with whom I have exchanged a word. Hands is not of the family, I believe. No, I am wrong. I exchanged a few words with your husband, last night. Your daughter looked at me the other day—but she did not speak. If she had, I feel sure that she would have said something bitterly unkind. You have been kind. You have done nothing to be pardoned. I hope you will trust me with your confidences."

"I shall speak to my husband; but I am afraid that your questions must remain unanswered—for the present, at least," she said.

"You do not think that he will share your faith in my innocence and honesty?" he queried.

"I do not mean that," she replied, tenderly. "He will be eager to believe that you did not come here as your father's agent, to injure us. Needless to say, he has changed his opinion of you since last night; but I feel sure that he will

think it unwise, impossible, to answer the questions you have asked me."

"I am not to know even what part my father plays in this mystery?"

"That would mean everything—and I feel convinced that my husband will not care to disclose everything now."

"So I am where I was before—and still held in suspicion!"

"You are angry with me? You do not think my gratitude sincere?"

"I don't think anger will help me—and I am certainly not angry with you. I mean to have another go at Hands, however, for the sake of my outraged self-respect—and I shall never forget the look your daughter gave me that day. She had no right to look at me in that way."

"You must try to forgive her—and the faithful Hands, too. Jean felt sure that you were an enemy. Your father has been a dangerous enemy of ours for years. I promise you that Jean shall never again look at you as if she despised you. She knows that you saved us all from death in the smoke and flames, and carried her through the fire at the peril of your own life. You are a hero now—to all of us."

"A hero? Then it would seem that I must play the part out under serious disadvantages."

The men came to the tent in which young Blizzard lay, a few hours later. Blessington took John's right hand in both of his, pressed it warmly, and thanked him for his services of the night in a few stammering words. It was evident that the great Mr. Blessington was deeply moved. Then Hands came—but that was not until after the bandage had been removed and the hero's eyes bathed again. John's eyes felt very sore, but he was relieved to discover that their vision was unimpaired. He looked at Alfred Hands with a faint, questioning, and slightly ironical smile on his blistered lips and in his inflamed and swollen eyes.

"I—I am glad to see you looking so well, sir," said Hands.

"Thank you," said John, "but I'm not feeling particularly fit."

"I trust that you'll not hold it against me, Mr. Blizzard. I am sorry for what happened. I beg your pardon for the way I treated you."

"You called me names that are not easily forgotten, Handy Hands."

"Yes, sir, but for that matter you didn't talk any too politely yourself. Hard words were said by both of us, Mr. Blizzard."

"You called me a liar and a spy, and an accomplice of the very rascals I had to fight against for my life. Now, I think, you realize that I knew nothing of Cox or of the fellow I shot, that I did not come into this country to spy upon you, and that whatever of enmity I may entertain toward you is due to your recent treatment of me. I hope that you realize, by this time, that I am as ignorant of my father's part in this affair as I am of the identity of your employers—and of their reason for living in this country and looking upon every stranger as a spy and an enemy. Am I right?"

"You are right," admitted Hands.

"And do you deny the fact that you told me that you had become a missionary?" asked Blizzard, quietly—"that you were even then on your way to Battle Harbour, intent on God's work?"

"I don't deny it," replied Hands, uneasily.

"So it seems that when I called you a liar I spoke the truth," said John. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and glanced at

Mr. Blessington. "I don't know what injury you have suffered at my father's hands," he continued, "but I assure you that I have had no part in it. I suspect that many of my father's enemies are honest people, while others are as dishonest as himself. I knew nothing of his affairs until a few months ago, when my suspicions were awakened and I made a study of them. I admit frankly that I was so ashamed of his methods of doing business that I left civilization and came away from the things and people I knew—by chance to this country. . . . I have been told that I am to continue to consider myself a prisoner —and that it is useless for me to ask questions. My story is now believed, it seems, and still I am not to be trusted with the truth of your case. It seems that I am to be at once a hero and a prisoner—an object of veneration and an object of suspicion. Very good. I shall be free from insults and assault, I suppose. . . . By the way, have you any idea how the fire was set? And what about my brother-prisoner, the worthy Johnny Cox?"

Hands walked slowly from the tent. Blessington looked at the battered and blistered form of the man who had saved the lives of his wife,

his daughter, and himself. His kindly, clear-cut face was very red. His kind eyes were dim.

"Cox escaped," he said. "I think he broke out of his room, early in the night, and lit the fire. Some of the men are looking for him now. His only chance of escape is by way of the coast, of course."

"I hope you will catch him again," said John. "If your suspicion is correct, then your house would be standing now if old Two Mink Sam had obeyed my orders."

"Yes," said Blessington. He was silent for some time. The two were alone in the tent. From outside came sounds of sawing and hammering.

"Yes, Kate Dormer told me so," added Blessington, at last. "The rascal gave Sam a hundred dollars for his liberty. I think we can recapture him; but let us talk of something else. . . . The fact is, I have—I have decided to throw myself upon your mercy. In other words, this mistake has gone far enough. You have been honest with me, and I think that your frankness—respecting your father—must have cost you pain. I trust you will pardon my saying that I cannot help thinking that—that your mother—must be

an exceptionally fine woman. . . . Ah, to begin with, you are no longer a prisoner."

"Thank you, but I mean to stay here," replied John.

Blessington nodded and leaned over him.

"I am John B. Wentworth," he said. "John Blessington Wentworth."

"Wentworth!" exclaimed Blizzard. "He died long ago—somewhere in Europe. I have studied the case thoroughly. It was this case that sickened me to the soul of my father's money. I knew nothing of it at the time. But when I had learned of it, and studied it, which was only a few months ago, then I began to understand my mother. I used to wonder why she suddenly ceased to go out—to go about—six or seven years ago. She knew. It was the disgrace. She belonged to an honest family—the Beardsleys, of Maryland. They, her family, had objected to her marrriage; but the marriage had been happy enough, I think, until that Wentworth business. I don't know how she came to discover the truth about that. . . . And you say that you are John B. Wentworth—the dead man—whom my father ruined; the great builder—the builder of railways and bridges and governments?"

"It sounds a mad statement to you, no doubt, but I can prove it," returned the other. "The safe containing my papers and our valuables was not destroyed by the fire. I did not die. I came to this place and built this house, instead. I will get the papers."

"You think that my father sent Cox here, and the other fellow?" cried Blizzard. "You think that he knows that you are alive—and where you are? But what can he do? He can do you no more harm, surely. And for that matter, why are you hiding?—and why did you pretend to die?"

"I will get the papers," said Mr. Blessington. "The safe is just outside."

He hurried from the tent. While he was away. Mrs. Blessington entered. She moved quickly to John's couch on the ground and took his uninjured hand between both of her hands.

"He has told you," she said, smiling down at him. "I am glad."

CHAPTER XVII

MEN AND WOMEN

Mr. Blessington entered the tent with the papers. He unfolded several imposing looking documents and held them towards John Blizzard. John shook his head.

"I don't want to see them," he said. "Your word is enough. But I am anxious to know why you are in hiding from my father. Why have you pretended to be dead all these years, instead of being alive and out in the world, fighting for your rights?"

The husband and wife exchanged glances. Then he told the story. He told it with a great deal of detail. John listened intently. At the conclusion of it he put out his hand and grasped that of the master of "The Folly."

"It is clever—and just," he said. "You are fighting him with his own weapons—and in the dark, as he fought you. But you fight for the recovery of rights and powers and reputations

that you were cheated out of. It is a hard thing to say, considering my name and blood—but I hope to God you win! I cannot bring myself to want to see him ruined, for he has always been kind to me—but I want to see him beaten—badly beaten—by an honest fighter. That you should do it—you and your sons—seems to me the very poetry of justice, as well as the irony of fate."

John's condition was greatly improved by the next day, and shortly before noon he was partially dressed by Alfred Hands and seated in a steamer chair in front of the tent. The sun was warm, but there was a chill in the air from the Greenland ice which continued to drift past the cove. John saw that his tent was one of a row of four. In front of him lay the black ruins of the house—a widespread confusion of ashes, half-burned logs and poles, smoked rocks and twisted furniture, with the massive chimneys still standing, overlooking the wreckage, fire-scarred but smokeless. Men and women from the cove, and belonging to the fallen house, moved about among the tumbled and smouldering timbers, searching for whatever of value might be found. Others were at work building a rough cabin, and the air was pleasantly alive to the ear

with the voices of saws, axes, and hammers, the cries of the builders one to another, the barking of Miss Blessington's setters, the cawing of crows on the barrens, the piping of snipe and plover, the tinkle of the French cook's spoon against one of his rescued and beloved copper kettles. It was a scene of simple and inspiring action, quick with hope in spite of the black ruins of the house; but John thought of the things that had been told him by Wentworth and blushed for his father. Seated there in the inspiring sunshine he felt only a great shame. His heart was heavy. One of the setters came up to his chair, wagging its fine tail, crouched at his feet, squirmed against and under his up-propped legs and at last found his uncovered hand and licked it violently with its wet, warm tongue. John fondled its silken ears, and he was thus employed when Jean Blessington Wentworth issued from the next tent in the row and came slowly towards him, gazing at him steadfastly with her wonderful blue eyes. And now there was no scorn in those eyes, and no unfriendliness, but good-will, gratitude, curiousity, and something of shy appeal.

For a couple of seconds he stared at her with his poor, lashless eyes. He remembered the day

she had glanced at his window. He recalled the night he had held her unconscious body in his arms and fought his way out of the burning house. And then it came to him that she was the daughter of the man whom his father had tried to ruin—and he knew that though he had won her friendship by his service of that night, the blood in his veins was the blood of the despised enemy of her family. All this flashed upon his inner vision during the few seconds that he sat motionless in his chair, staring at her slow approach with blood-shot eyes. Then, recovering himself, he removed his hat and lowered his feet from the stool in front of him, with the intention of standing. He winced at the pain of it when his blistered soles touched the ground. Jean saw and understood, quick as a flash. She darted forward with a little cry of consternation and sweet concern.

"No. No. You must not move!" she cried. "Sit still. *Please.*"

And before he knew what was happening, she had stooped, lifted his blanket-enrolled feet tenderly in her arms, and bestowed them gently upon the stool. Then she stood straight, with flushed cheeks and glowing eyes, looked fairly

into his dismayed face for a moment and swiftly away. He gulped hard, feeling for his voice.

"Why—why did you do that?" he asked.

"What would Hands say—if you put your feet down?" she replied, with a catch in her voice.

His bruised and blistered face crimsoned with confusion. His wits deserted him—and small wonder, when you consider all the circumstances. It was months since he had seen a woman anything like this one, and he felt that he had never before seen one quite like Jean. He was not yet thirty years of age, and his heart was not as old as that. He was strong, too, despite his somewhat battered and singed exterior, and he was inclined to brisk adventures and colourful romance. One of his mother's uncles had been a poet and many of her people had been sailors and soldiers. From his father, thank Heaven, he had inherited nothing but an iron constitution and a strength of purpose. Jean touched him as keenly in her new manner as she had in her old. Now he felt the charm of her as deep and sharp as he had felt her scorn that day she had glanced at his window. But you must not imagine that a man of John Blizzard's character, attainments, and opportunities had reached his twenty-seventh year without

being hurt, and entertained, by the attractions of women. John was a man, not a cabbage—and he had not been raised in a cabbage-patch. Jean reminded him of an English girl he had been devoted to at one time, also of a Scotch girl who had quite spoiled his eye for a day's grouse shooting, and also of a French girl on the moonlit lawn of a little white château in the heart of the forest of Mount Richard. A glance of his bashful and lashless eyes showed him that Miss Wentworth enjoyed many charms in common with these ladies of his romantic past, but also that she was finer than any of these—perhaps finer than all of them. Her eyes were more wonderful than the Berkshire girl's. Her mouth and chin were stronger, and at the same time sweeter, than the Scotch girl's. Even in bodily grace she was the superior of the slender lady of the forest.

That his wits should go flying abroad for the moment is not to be wondered at.

"You shouldn't have lifted my feet," he complained, fretfully.

"But you lifted me—all of me—and carried me through fire and smoke—and saved my life," she answered breathlessly, looking at the black mass of the fallen house. And she trembled suddenly,

as if a breath of the chill of the death that she had so narrowly escaped had blown upon her from those charred and smouldering timbers.

"One good turn deserves another," said John, solemnly, and then the absurdity of the remark suddenly breaking upon him, be began to laugh violently. He was far too sore to laugh with any degree of comfort.

"I owe you my life," cried Jean. "It is nothing to laugh about—but it is very kind and tactful of you to laugh, after the way we treated you. We all feel heartily ashamed of ourselves."

And then she, too, began to laugh, for no other reason in the world but that she knew she must either laugh or cry. Her nerves and eyes had not recovered entirely from the terrific experience of two nights before. So she stood there in the sunshine, close to John's chair, laughing with half-closed eyes and swaying a little as she laughed.

"It is very good of you to say so," gasped John, at last. Then, coldly and suddenly, he remembered that he was his father's son, and the injury his father had done to these people. He remembered that this girl was the daughter and granddaughter of the men whom his father had robbed of wealth and power and reputation.

"I do not wonder that you hated and despised me," he said, "and that you still distrust me in the bottom of your heart."

Jean stopped laughing and looked at him with wide and startled eyes.

"But I do not distrust you," she said. "We were all very blind ever to distrust you. Now we know you. I trust you—as I trust my own father and Alfred Hands. Why do you say that I still distrust you?"

"Then you must still feel something of hate for me," he said. "You cannot forget—so soon—that I am the son of your enemy."

At that moment Mrs. Wentworth appeared out of one of the tents and joined her daughter. She stooped above John and tucked his blankets about his shoulders, patting him tenderly as she did so.

The Wentworths lunched with John, in front of the tent which he shared with Mr. Wentworth (to give him his real name) and Alfred Hands. Hands waited on them. Then the family scattered about its affairs and Hands moved young Blizzard into the tent, for the wind was blowing cold off the scattered ice to seaward. The tent was warmed by a small oil-stove.

Hands placed cigarettes and cigars at his elbow, together with a full-sized cow-bell.

"I hope you are comfortable, sir," said Hands. "If you want anything, just ring the bell. Someone will be sure to hear it. And I want to know, sir, if you still hold that missionary lie against me?"

"No," replied John. "Since I have heard the story from Mr. Wentworth I have changed my opinion of you entirely, Hands. I've gone back to my old opinion of you. Under the circumstances, that missionary game was not only excusable but praiseworthy. And I am glad to hear that your report of me was highly complimentary—that you believed me then, and did not change your opinion of me until that morning you caught me by the kitchen door."

"That is right, sir," said Hands. "I—I made a grave mistake that morning. I should have known better than to think so meanly of you. I want to say, sir, that I sincerely hope that we may never come to blows again."

"I promise you that if we ever do, the fight will not be of my making," replied John.

"Nor of mine, sir, I promise you," said Hands. "The truth is, I've very little stomach left for

that sort of thing. I've outgrown the taste for it, sir. I've grown above it. I feel shame for that fight, for two reasons ; the first, that I made such a mistake and did my best to bruise and beat and disable a gentleman like yourself, and second that my best wasn't good enough for the job. If you'd fought a bit nastier, sir, and less like a gentleman, and played a bit over my kidneys, you'd have had been trimmed in the first ten minutes."

John smiled and extended his uninjured hand. The ex-champion grasped it, and his cheeks flushed and his eyes sparkled. Then, after reminding the invalid again to ring the bell if he wanted anything, Hands left the tent. John smoked a cigarette. After that, he slept for a couple of hours in his chair. He was awakened by the entrance of Jean. She read aloud to him from the only book that had been saved from the fire—a bulky copy of "The Cloister and The Hearth" which had strayed from the library to the kitchen and been rescued by the chef, who had mistaken it for a cook-book in the confusion. She read for an hour. Mrs. Wentworth came in, and tea was made at the oil-stove.

Now I must look up Bill Sprowl. Bill lost no

time at "The Folly," but set out for the shack of Two Mink Sam within eight hours of handing over his prisoner—that is to say, at sunrise of the following morning. His foot pained him, but he was eager to recover his fox-skin which he knew to be still in the possession of Kate Dormer. He reached Two Mink Sam's shack without accident, but very lame in one foot. He was in a bad temper, and he talked to Kate as she had never before been talked to by an admirer. He frightened her so that she melted to tears. He suspected, correctly, that this was no sign that her heart was melted; and so he kept right on, threatening and abusing, until she produced the precious black fox and handed it over. At that he became gentler, filled his pipe, requested a pot of tea and fell to telling his recent adventures. He made a fine story of his chase and capture of his old rival, Johnny Cox. Cox cut even a more ridiculous figure in the narrative than he had in the actual experience—and that had been ridiculous enough, Heaven knows. Kate blushed for shame of her several-times lover. And when she heard that he was a prisoner at "The Folly," in the power of the formidable Mr. Hands, she wondered how she had ever been so foolish as to listen to him.

And when she heard that the big, distinguished stranger was also a prisoner at "The Folly," she decided that she had made another mistake. And the trader, Luke Cassin, had lost his schooner and his stores. She poured another mug of tea for Bill, and sweetened it with molasses, as the custom is in that country. Molasses is known as "long sweetenin'" and sugar as "short sweetenin'". The *long* is the more generally used, the more generally obtainable. As she poured the tea into the mug, and dipped the molasses in an iron spoon, her tear-wet eyes rested pathetically and tenderly upon the trapper's bearded face; and as she stirred the delectable mixture for him (with the same iron spoon), she pressed her rounded shoulder against his. But Bill did not look at her—just then. Having told all the news that he knew, he drank his second mug of tea in a heavy silence, and puffed busily on his pipe. Old Two Mink Sam, smoking in the open door, read the signs and winked at the morning sun. He had a very poor opinion of the intelligence of white men and a proportionately high one of the wiles of women.

Kate tried to be brave. Oh, yes! She dried

her poor eyes again and again. She did her best to choke down her heart-rending, insistent sobs. The trapper swigged his tea. For a while he enjoyed the situation. He felt a novel and pleasant sense of mastery. Presently he began to wish that Kate would take it more calmly. What the devil was she blubbering about, anyway? He had done nothing to her. She had thrown him over, first for the trader and then for the sailor, and robbed him of his fox-skin to boot. She had made him drunk, and she had done her best to make a liar of him to Mr. Hands. He got to his feet and started across the room. He limped sharply. Kate left the table with a little cry, darted after him and caught hold of his arm.

"Saints alive, Bill, I was that distracted wid shame I clean forgot about yer poor foot," she exclaimed. "Set down. Sure, it must be bathed wid hot water, an' tied up an' rested."

"Me foot bes all right," grumbled Bill. "Sure, it bes as right this minute as it were when I copied acrost the river on the runnin' ice an' hunted that squid Johnny Cox, an' overhauled him, an' put the fear o' God into the dirty little soul o' him. Me foot'll do grand till I get home,

Kate Dormer. Don't ye worry about it, Kate Dormer."

Kate did not relinquish her hold. She piloted him to a bench near the door. She was strong. She sat him down on the bench. He resisted weakly, grumbling a wordless protest.

"Oh, yer poor foot," she whispered, and slipped her arms around his neck. "Oh, Bill, I knowed ye'd come for me. I prayed the saints ye'd come for me."

"The divil ye did," exclaimed Bill. "Ye'd best keep yer prayers for Johnny Cox."

Old Two Mink Sam winked at the landscape.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEWS FROM "UP ALONG". LUKE CASSIN. JOHNNY COX.

You see that Bill Sprowl was a fool where Kate Dormer was concerned. Though Kate was as bold as brass, she could not screw up quite enough courage to return to Fore-and-Aft Cove, so she and Bill went north to Black Island Tickle and were married, in the course of time, by a missionary from the south. Bill sold the black fox for three hundred dollars—about half its value, for it was a fine skin. I have heard that Kate led her husband a dog's life until, five years after their marriage, he ran away in the night and was no more seen on that coast. It is generally believed that he took to deep-sea sailing out of some Newfoundland port.

The sun-filled days drifted over the cove and the black wreckage of "The Folly"; the ice drifted along the coast and vanished at last. John Blizzard's cuts and blisters healed, and the sore-

ness went out of his ribs; the boats went out to the fishing, and guards were set along the coast for miles, north and south, on the watch for Johnny Cox; and one fine day Francis Dorian appeared. Dorian had come north from St. John's, Newfoundland, on the first boat of the season, and had disembarked at Battle Harbour —for the coastal steamers do not put in at Fore-and-Aft Cove, as a regular thing. They have been known to do so, perhaps once in five years, when driven to it by stress of weather. From Battle Harbour the Canadian had crawled northward by short stages, in each little harbour dismissing the man and the skiff that had brought him over the last stage and engaging another man and another skiff for the next leg of the journey.

It was about ten o'clock of a Saturday morning when Dorian stepped out of the bows of the skiff to the landwash of the little cove. He turned and drew the private mail-bag from the skiff, told the fisherman to follow him with the rest of his kit, and set off briskly up through the clinging stages and cabin of the hamlet. He sang as he went up the twisting path, and glanced brightly around him. Little black crackies came

yelping into his path, only to dance about him, with wagging tails, captivated by the dash and friendly cheer of his appearance and bearing. The men were away at the fishing, but women looked out at him from the low doors and humble windows. He did not pause to give them greeting, but contented himself, for the moment, with waving his right hand airily and blowing kisses from the tips of his fingers. He had shaved chin and cheeks that morning, by lantern light, before dawn. He wore a soft felt hat on his handsome head that became him to a wish, a red silk scarf knotted about his neck, a pair of brand new skinnywoppers on his feet which he had bought in Battle Harbour for this very occasion. He topped the edge of the barren. The song failed on his lips, and he stood aghast at the altered scene that met his vision. In the place of the wide house that he had known, which had stood for him as a very haven of rest and good cheer in this desolate wild, he saw the black and grey ashes, the blackened timbers dragged into stacks for fuel, the massive chimneys looming naked and discoloured above the empty cellars. Beyond this he saw the outhouses old and new, the familiar wood-yard, the blacksmith's forge, the

grey tents, and the builders and servants of the family at work in the sun.

Francis Dorian expressed his astonishment and regret at what he saw in the language of the Quebec woods. Then he hitched the mail-bag higher on his shoulder and continued his brisk advance.

It was a fat bag that he gave into the hands of Mr. Wentworth. The great man immediately retired to the tent which he now used as a library, and Hands piloted the courier away to the newly constructed kitchen and mess-room, where a hot meal was soon spread. Jean, who was out on the barren, got wind of Dorian's arrival and hurried to her father's tent. He gave her the papers from London and New York and waved her away. Already he had half a dozen letters open in front of him. Jean shared the papers fairly with her mother, and they sat down in the sunshine to read, on chairs which Hands and John Blizzard had built. John was away, fishing with the men of the cove.

By chance, the first paper that Jean opened was a New York "Shout". She had not read for longer than ten minutes when she suddenly sprang to her feet with a little cry.

"Look, it is all here!" she exclaimed. "And H. P. Blizzard is offering a reward." She held the crumpled sheet before her mother's apprehensive eyes, pointing to the head of a certain column with a finger that trembled.

"All here?" queried Mrs. Wentworth, with dismay in her voice. "Has he found us out? Oh, my dear, it cannot be!"

"It is about John," said the girl. "There is no mention of us. Read it. They don't know where he is; and his father has offered a reward of five thousand dollars for word of his whereabouts."

Mrs. Wentworth read the story. At last she glanced up at her daughter and sighed. She smiled, but there were tears in her eyes.

"And unless that young man had saved all our lives, at the peril of his own, we should still be treating him as a spy and a liar," she said. "Oh, it makes me hate and despise myself to think of it!"

Jean shook her head. "I am not so sure of that," she replied slowly. "Honesty will out, you know, like crime. His indignation was far too righteous to be misunderstood for long—and his bitterness far to bitter to be anything but the

real thing. Oh, how I wish he had beaten Hands that day! He very nearly did—and I am sure he would have if they had fought again. How could we see whether he was honest or not, when his face was all cut and puffed, and tied up in bandages? We treated him shamefully—just because he happened to be a Blizzard. I am glad that he saved our lives, as we could not learn to trust him in any other way."

Mrs. Wentworth eyed her intently and picked up another paper from the ground. She looked slightly worried.

"Have you and John become very good friends?" she asked.

"I don't know," said the girl. "Sometimes I think so—and then, for no reason that I can see, he avoids me for a day or two. And he does not talk to me now as freely as he used to. I want to be his very good friend. I admire him tremendously—and I can never forget, even for an hour, that he carried me out of that burning house. I admire him more than any man I know, except father, of course—and perhaps Alfred Hands?"

Mrs. Wentworth smiled very faintly; and, though she tried to hide the fact by gazing closely at the paper in her lap, she looked decided-

ly relieved. That innocent reference to Alfred Hands had set her at her ease. She admired John. She was very fond of him; but, in spite of all his charms and virtues, he remained the the son of H. P. Blizzard. She did not want her daughter to lose her heart to any man with a drop of that blood in his veins. This was the way she felt and, at the same time, she was ashamed of the feeling. She suspected that it was a sign of littleness in her own character—of something lacking in heart or mind. She was ashamed of it—and yet she clung to it. She felt sure her husband did not feel so toward John; that he accepted the young man at his own worth and would not have thought more highly of him if he had been a Wentworth; and she knew that it was so with Jean and Hands. But she was glad to see that Jean thought of him only as a very good friend, and as the admirable person whom they had all treated badly and who had saved all their lives.

"And here it is in another paper," she said. "John has caused a great sensation in New York. He was very popular, it seems."

"And here is a whole column about it in a Boston paper," said Jean.

Yes, the papers were full of it. John Blizzard, the only son of H. P. Blizzard, the multi-millionaire, had gone away without leaving an address behind him. He had left a brief note for his mother, telling her not to worry about him. That was all. His clubs knew him no more, and his mail gathered dust in many letter-boxes. His horses were exercised by grooms. His valet sat about listlessly all day in his departed master's clothes. This was all very pretty and touching, but why had he gone away? Some said that he had asked his father to raise his allowance from two thousand dollars a month to three thousand, and that the old man had refused to comply with the reasonable request. Some said that a certain young woman had forsaken him for a Russian prince. Another story was to the effect that he had followed a company of English actors—and actresses—back to England, under a wig and an assumed name, all for the love of a lady who already wore around her neck the price of a European throne. One ready writer made a closer shot when he assured his readers that the young man had discovered the sources of the paternal millions, had pronounced the millions tainted by blood and trickery, and had fled for

Russia, in the steerage of a liner, a confirmed socialist of the most violent type, bent upon forgetting the disgrace of the past in the excitement of blowing a Grand Duke or so to smithereens.

The ladies read all these things with a great deal of amusement and not a little concern. Then they gathered up all the papers, with the exception of one that had fallen beneath a chair, and went to Mr. Wentworth's tent to exchange the news of the papers for the news of his letters. No sooner had they vanished into the tent than Mr. Luke Cassin appeared from the forge, darted and stooped and picked up the fallen paper and whipped back to cover. He was alone in the forge. He had overheard much of the conversation of Jean and Mrs. Blessington. He soon found what he was looking for in the paper, and absorbed it with bulging eyes. So this was the story, was it? He saw John's case in an instant, and something of the rest of the mystery began to clear, piece-meal in his mind. You must know that he had been working for Wentworth since his return from his fruitless search for Johnny Cox, and that he had once overheard fragments of a conversation between Hands and John. Mr. Wentworth had persuaded him to remain in the

cove with the offer of high wages and with the price of the lost schooner. Half of the price of the schooner had already been paid, and the balance was to be paid in October. So Luke had remained, and had pretended gratitude and friendship, and had been on his best behaviour for more than a week. He had heard of the way in which John Blizzard had been received and treated before the fire. And now he held the story in his hand. This young man (whom, by the way, he did not like) was the son of the rich H. P. Blizzard of New York. Also (as he had gathered) he was the son of a man whom the Blessingtons feared and hated. Therefore, the Blessingtons feared and hated H. P. Blizzard. Very good. And now the father of John, and the enemy of these stuck-up Blessingtons (who treated him like a servant), was offering five thousand dollars for information concerning the whereabouts of his son. Good again! Exceedingly good! There was money in this—big money. He felt a glow of sincere gratitude toward Bill Sprowl for having sunk his schooner in the harbour and so kept him in the place. Five thousand dollars—and a trip to New York, to boot, paid for with Blessington's money. It

was all to the good. And might there not be more than five thousand in it for him? He rather thought that there might be more.

Wentworth's letters from his sons contained good news. All was going well. Thomas was on his way to South America even now, to join the Honest Leader in the hills, and William was in New York. H. P. Blizzard and his agents evidently suspected nothing, feared nothing. Mr. Blizzard's dummy ruler in the little republic was in bad odour with all classes of the population except his own corrupt officials. His army was large, but rotten at the core. In the hills the Honest Leader awaited the winter and the word, with machine-guns and rifles. His old soldiers and captains were slowly gathering to him. By November he would be ready to strike. Then the country would be free again, and the Wentworths would be recalled to take charge again of the railways they had built for the republic and the mines they had opened, of the plantations they had created in partnership with the people, and of the electric tram-lines and machine-shops in the city.

Mr. Wentworth gave the gist of the news briefly to his wife and daughter, then handed

them the letters and took the newspapers. He read of the sensation caused by John's mysterious departure from New York with mingled emotions.

"Honest!" he exclaimed. "Not one young fellow in a thousand would do it."

"That is what I think," said Jean, glancing up from a letter.

But Mrs. Blessington Wentworth was thinking of something else.

"What would happen if Blizzard should discover us now?" she asked.

Wentworth drew reflectively on his cigar, lowered his paper, and turned his gaze upward to the roof of the tent.

"He'd suspect our game in a minute," he said, with conviction. "And once he suspected it, he'd soon find it out. He is devilishly clever. Then the hands of Da Costa and the boys would be forced. They would have to strike—and, at the best, the result would be doubtful. Beyond that—God only knows!"

"Absolute ruin," said Mrs. Wentworth.

Her husband blew a thin, azure stream of smoke toward the roof of the tent.

"I think you have named it, my dear," he said.

The fishing boats returned before sundown.

John Blizzard was met by Jean, half-way between the top of the cliff and the tents. She told him of Dorian's arrival, of the contents of the letters, and of the excitement of the press over his own mysterious departure into the unknown. John took it quietly. He was glad of the good news from the Wentworth boys and amused by his father's offer of five thousand dollars for information concerning his whereabouts. They walked slowly toward the tents, side by side, John staring straight ahead, the girl turning her face toward him frequently, with something of wonder and anxiety in her eyes. He puzzled her. His manner toward her seemed to grow more reserved every day. Had she done or said anything to offend him, since the night of the fire. She could not think that she had. She certainly had not intended to, anyway. Heavens, no! She would as willingly hurt the feelings of her own father as of John Blizzard; and, despite her remark to her mother, she would murder the trusty Alfred Hands with far less compunction than she would cause this young man a single heart-ache. In short, this beautiful young woman was not quite as artless as her clever mother imagined. But she was exceedingly modest. That was the devil

of it! So, for the twentieth time, she refrained from asking John if she had offended him in any way.

"I think these papers should be burned," said John. "And we must keep this story quiet. The reward might tempt some honest man to slip away to New York. Then the fat would be in the fire. I'm not thinking of myself, but of you."

"Yes," said the girl. "It would mean our ruin."

And that was all she could say, though she wanted to say a great deal more. They walked the rest of the way in silence.

Johnny Cox had not been seen by any of the watchers since the night of the fire, and no word of his movements or whereabouts had reached Mr. Wentworth. But Johnny was not dead, and neither had he escaped from the country. He was in a bad way. After escaping through the window of his room and setting fire to the roof of "The Folly," he had fled northward, without rifle, food, or outfit. He had reached the Sprowls' cabin at the mouth of Fox River and there managed to steal a little food. Later, on his way to Black Island Tickle, he had almost walked into the arms of Luke Cassin and his companion. He

had hidden himself and overheard enough of their conversation to learn that they were hunting for him, and had warned the entire coast to capture him on sight and fetch him along to Fore-and-Aft Cove. He had doubled back, badly frightened. He had revisited Two Mink Sam's cabin up the river, but he had been afraid to show himself even to Sam and had contented himself with the theft of some dried fish from the store-house. Later, he worked slowly southward again, hoping to find the coast clear beyond Fore-and-Aft Cove; but Blessington's men were everywhere by that time, watching for the man who had set fire to the big house. So he continued to haunt the hummocks and barrens like a stray dog, stealing food, nursing fear and a thirst for revenge in his miserable little heart. By one of his thefts he became possessed of a few small hooks and some twine, and so was able to catch trout. He lurked about between the hills and the coast, ragged and unarmed and usually hungry, stealing down to an inhabited harbour, sometimes, under cover of night, perhaps only to crawl away again at the yelp of a dog.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEPARTURE OF LUKE CASSIN. SUSPENSE. THE FUGITIVE

Mr. Wentworth was shaving when Afred Hands looked in upon him with the announcement that Luke Cassin, the ex-trader, had not appeared for his breakfast, nor reported for duty at the blacksmith's shop.

"Drunk again, I suppose," said Wentworth. "Send him to me as soon as he is fit to get out of his bunk. I threatened to fine him last week, but I'll do it this time—three day's pay. He's no good!"

"He's not in his bunk, sir," replied Hands. "His blankets and his rifle have gone too, sir—likewise the fellow who brought Dorian in yesterday, and the skiff."

Wentworth lowered his razor from his chin and turned an astonished, lather-trimmed face upon the trusty Hands.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "Run away!—with a

week's wages and fifteen hundred dollars still coming to him? He must be a fool!"

"It's Mr. Blizzard's opinion that he's worse than a fool, sir," replied Hands. "Mr. Blizzard thinks that he's heard about that five-thousand-dollar reward, sir, and has gone to collect it—and that a smart fellow like him will put two and two together, sir. Mr. Blizzard didn't wait a minute for anything, but jumped into a dory and started out to the fishing-grounds, to send the quickest of the boats—Nick Furlong's, sir—after the skiff. He took his rifle along with him."

Mr. Wentworth took up his razor and turned again to the little mirror.

"Mr. Blizzard did the right thing, the only thing," he said. "We can do nothing but await results. Keep it quiet, Hands. It would be useless to send men along the coast. Too late. None of our men who are on the look-out for Johnny Cox would think of stopping Luke Cassin."

Hands retired, and Mr. Wentworth went on with his toilet. The family spent an anxious day. The boats returned in the evening, with word that John had found them at nine o'clock, or thereabouts, and sailed away to the south

with Nick Furlong. The night passed, and the next day and the next night, without any word or sign of John Blizzard. But at nine o'clock of the morning of the third day, the patched, red sail of Nick Furlong's "bully" was sighted, rounding a point of land to the southward. The Wentworths hurried down to the landwash to meet it. As it entered the cove the sail was lowered, and the watchers saw that it contained only the two men, John Blizzard and Nick Furlong.

John sprang ashore, rifle in hand, and lifted his battered felt hat—a second-hand article that he had borrowed from the butler. His face was grim, and he looked tired.

"Gone clean away," he said. "He's aboard the 'Virginian Lake,' southward bound, by now."

Wentworth and the two women stared at him with colourless faces.

"It is all my fault," said Wentworth. "I should have kept him tied up—and I should not have given him any money."

"I tried to overhaul the steamer, with the intention of going aboard and settling him, somehow, before reaching St. John's. However, we didn't come within hailing-distance of her."

"Why is your wrist tied up like that?" asked Jean.

They all looked at John's left wrist, which was bound around with linen and over the linen a bandage of sailcloth. Even John glanced down at it.

"It's not serious in itself—but the results were serious," he said. "But for that—and it was pure chance—we'd have collared him. I will tell you about it in the tent, if I may. The fact is, I feel a bit faint. We ran short of grub, you see."

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Wentworth. "Let me help you—with a hand under your left shoulder. Wounded? And hungry? Confound it, John, my muddled affairs will be the death of you yet."

"That would only be just, I think," replied John, grimly.

"I will run ahead and see that the coffee is hot, and get some brandy," said Jean, and immediately took to her heels and went flying up the steep and twisting path.

"Let me help you on this side," said Mrs. Wentworth, gently. "I am strong, John. Put your arm across my shoulders—around my neck—and lean as hard as you like."

In this manner they went slowly up the path. John had lost a considerable amount of blood, and he was weak with hunger, so it is not to be wondered at that his knees wobbled a great deal and that he was forced to distribute most of his weight between the Wentworths. A stalwart young woman of the cove offered to take Mrs. Wentworth's place, only to be waved kindly but firmly aside. They were met at the top of the path by Alfred Hands, with a flask of brandy.

Half an hour later, John told his brief story. Furlong's bully had outsailed the skiff in which Cassin had made his escape; but the skiff had had a long start, and it was past noon before they sighted it. They came within long rifle-range. They signalled for the skiff to lay-to, but in vain. Then John fired, wide and high, in hope of bringing them to reason. He fired again, not quite so wide; and yet again, with the intention of doing some damage. Both boats were jumping pretty freely in a capfull of wind. Accurate shooting was out of the question. Then Luke Cassin opened fire from the stern-sheets of the skiff, and his very first shot caught John in the wrist. The bullet cut a small artery; and though it glanced off the bone it numbed the whole arm to

the wrist and made him feel very sick : but, worse than all, it had scared Nick Furlong so badly that he had headed for the shore in a panic, in spite of John's prayers and threats. Next day they sighted the skiff again, and the south-bound coastal steamer as well; and from far away they saw the ship slow down and the little skiff run alongside. That was the end of his story. As for his wrist, it was nothing; and if Nick Furlong had possessed half as much courage and brains as a squid they would have caught Luke Cassin and brought him back.

John was soon himself again in body (save for a slight stiffness in the left wrist), but his spirit was dejected. He fretted more against the enforced inaction than did Mr. Wentworth or Hands. He felt his failure to capture Luke Cassin keenly, and brooded over it continually. There seemed to be nothing to do but wait. He might go to New York and deny Cassin's story to his father, but even if his father should believe him—which was unlikely—it would be too late to stop an investigation of the people of Fore-and-Aft Cove. He knew his father. He knew that private detectives—or perhaps H.P. himself—would start for the Labrador within an hour of

the arrival of Luke Cassin in Wall Street. The only thing to do was to await the invasion, but what was to be done upon the arrival of the invaders was more than he could think. He was ready to do anything, to go as far as any one. If Wentworth wanted him to fight, he would fight. If the Wentworths decided to run away, he would assist them and join them in the flight. But it would be useless for the Wentworths to run away and hide again at this stage of the game. It would be an admission of identity. But however that might be, he was willing to do anything expected of him short of shooting his own father. He was heart and hand with the Wentworths in this matter. His self-respect demanded the success of their plans. His father had ruined them once, but he had been guiltless of that. But if their well-laid schemes for recovery should go to pieces now, upon the very eve of a successful maturity, the fault would be his. If he had not come blundering to this coast the reward for five thousand dollars would not have meant anything to Luke Cassin, and therefore the Wentworths' chances of maintaining their secret until winter would have been good. He cursed the mischance that had brought him to this

spot to the undoing of his friends—and yet, if he had not come, he would not have met Jean. If he had not happened upon Fore-and-Aft Cove he would not have saved her life; but again, would Johnny Cox have been captured, and brought to "The Folly," and would the fire have been set to the roof, if he had not come? It was hard to say. He was woven into the life and events of this place and these people as if his coming had been ordained by Fate, in the youth of the world. But for him, ten to one Francis Dorian and the half-breed would have been overpowered by Johnny Cox and the other ruffian, the mails stolen for a certainty and perhaps murder done; and in that case Mr. John Blessington's secret would have been lost. Looked at from every point of view, it was hard to say whether he had done good or harm.

Jean found courage, one day, to ask John why he was so moody. He looked at her steadily until the colour crept up under her eyes and she turned her face away from him.

"Because I can't help you," he said. "It is all my fault—and yet I am helpless."

"But why do you say it is your fault?" she asked.

He explained his idea.

"There is nothing in that," she said. "Let us consider it logically. We have one thing to put down against you, and that is the reward which took Cassin away to New York. On the other hand—well, lend me your pencil and I'll put it all down on paper."

She worked it out, and proved to her absolute satisfaction that John had not only delayed the disclosure of their secret by a couple of months at least, but had saved the lives of her father, her mother, and herself.

"I don't know what we should have done without you," she said. "To begin with, we would have been dead by now."

She tried to laugh, but her blue eyes dimmed with tears.

"But what can I do now!" cried John. "How can I help you now? It is terrible to—to sit here useless and know that—that my father is coming to bring ruin to you again."

"I don't know what you can do," she replied, very softly, "but I feel sure that some one will do something to save us—and I am sure, in my heart, that it will be you."

"I would to God it might be so!" he exclaimed,

breathlessly. "I would give my right hand—both my hands—to save you."

"I believe you," she whispered, "and I wonder why it is so."

Then she turned, without looking at him, and walked slowly toward her own tent; and he stood like a stock where she had left him, very red in the face, gazing after her. When they met again, an hour later, he avoided her glance.

Eight days after the departure of Luke Cassin, Francis Dorian was sent out again. He carried two letters, both in cipher, each the duplicate of the other. They contained the whole story—all about John Blizzard, Johnny Cox and Luke Cassin, and they advised a quickening of preparations for the great stroke. But the avengers were to await the word, which would be sent them at the last moment, when all hope of escaping an issue was gone. At the word they were to strike, for then would be the last and only chance. The word would go to them by skiff, by wire, by cable, and by wireless, from Battle Harbour to Newfoundland, from the north of the island to St. John's, from St. John's to Cape Breton, then to New York, to one of the West Indian Islands, to British Guiana, to the capital of the little republic, and

from there, by galloper, up to the honest leader in the hills.

Jean and John went fishing one day, at the girl's suggestion. There was nothing else to do; and while awaiting a demolishing blow from the fist of Fate a man may as well go fishing as sit and twiddle his thumbs and wonder where the bolt will hit him. It was a glorious day, with no clouds in the sky and a breath of wind from the south-west. A draft of air from the sou'-west means a good day for the trout-fishing in that country. But these two, on this day, were not particularly keen about catching trout. They wanted to forget, for a little, the shadow of disaster that hung over the little grey tents and the black ruins of "The Folly". It was mid-morning when they set out. John carried a tea-kettle and a dozen sandwiches. They passed the first pond without wetting a fly. They exchanged words —a few about the weather, a few about the ponds, the country and the fish—but they did not talk. To talk, people must exchange thoughts; but these two seemed to be taking a great deal of trouble to keep their thoughts to themselves. To see them and hear them, one would think that a spell of some kind had been laid on them.

Heaven knows, perhaps it had! They skirted pond after pond, and every pond alive with trout, for all the world as if they were walking in their sleep and had forgotten to bring their tackle with them.

"I like stream fishing better than lake fishing," said Jean.

"We must try Fox River some day, for salmon," said John.

"I killed a few big fish there last year," said Jean, speaking without animation. "Father and I spent a week on the river."

John did not reply. He halted, a few seconds later.

"Skiff Pond," he said. "I'll swear that I saw something on the shore. It has gone now, behind that rock. It went quick as a flash."

"What was it?" asked the girl. "I did not see anything."

"It looked like a man. It may have been nothing. Perhaps my eyes are out of order."

"Perhaps it is a spy. Oh, how I wish that we might all run away! My nerves are going all to pieces. I am afraid. It is this suspense."

"He wouldn't have any new spies in as soon

as this," said John, quietly. "I'll take a look around—and then we'll fish a bit. There is good water at the south-west end of the lake, close in to shore."

He spoke with a calmness that sounded like indifference. He did not look at his companion, but kept his gaze fixed straight ahead at a point on the far side of the pond.

"I think you had better wait here while I reconnoitre," he added.

"But you are not armed," she protested. "Let us turn back."

"There is no danger," he replied; "and if my eyes were right—if there is a man over there—I must see him. If it is a spy, then I must collar him. It may be that fellow who vanished the night of the fire—Johnny Cox. He has no rifle. You wait here."

"If you go—I want to go too. Don't leave me here."

"Please wait here. I'll only be away a few minutes."

"Please take me with you! I am afraid! It may be someone with a rifle."

"There is nothing to be afraid of. You will be safe here."

She caught him by the right wrist with an ungloved hand. She was very pale.

"It is for you that I am afraid," she cried.

He did not look at her. He continued to stare across the big pond, but his face hardened.

"You must not be too kind," he said, thickly. "Wait here."

"Have you no heart?" she whispered. "I tell you that I am afraid!"

He turned upon her swiftly, his eyes blazing, his face as white as paper. She shrank back, her own face colourless, her eyes aflame.

"I cautioned you not to be too kind," he whispered, and caught her in his arms, pressed her to him, and kissed her on the eyes and mouth. In a second he had freed her, turned and was racing down toward the pond. She swayed where he left her, with one hand pressed to her side. She tried to call his name, but her lips moved and uttered no sound. Tears sprang to her eyes, brimmed and sparkled on her cheeks; but they were not tears of anger. Impending ruin was forgotten. The flush of her young blood flowed into her cheeks again, mantling high upon her

white forehead and low over neck and throat. And still she pressed her hand to her side, high up against her breast, and stood swaying, gazing after John with tear-filmed eyes. Then she began to follow him down toward the pond, moving slowly and uncertainly at first across the rough ground.

Across the pond, crouched behind a small boulder of granite, poor Johnny Cox showed his teeth in a nervous, soundless snarl at the sight of John Blizzard running toward him. Johnny had stolen a sealing gun recently; and now he held it in his hands. It was loaded with buck-shot. The fugitive had suffered too much of late, and now he was temporarily insane. He crouched low and stared out at the approaching enemy with bright, unhuman eyes. Once he glanced behind him, as if for a way of retreat; but though the whole wilderness was open to him, he did not leave the shelter of the rock. He raised the long, cumbersome weapon to his shoulder and fired. The report shook the sunlit barrens and sent clapping echoes around the lake. But John Blizzard came on steadily. He had not been touched. Cox had fired high and wide, as

usual. With a yelp of fear, the fugitive flung down the empty gun, turned and fled.

John halted and looked back. What was that he had heard? He turned and ran back along the way he had come, at top speed. He found Jean prone on the moss, very white in the face and unconscious. He dropped to his knees beside her with a cry of despair. There was blood on the side of her neck—yes, and on the left shoulder of her thin hunting-shirt. He forced a little brandy and water between her pale lips, and bathed her wrists and temples with the mixture. He loosened the collar of her shirt and wiped the blood from her neck. Thank God! The wound on her neck was no more than a shallow cut. He washed it with brandy and water and bandaged it with his handkerchief. Her eye-lids fluttered, then lifted, and she gazed up into his horror-striken face.

He moaned. His eyes were pits of misery and his strong lips trembled.

"He fired at me," he whispered. "I would to God the whole charge had hit me."

"I think—I am not much hurt," she breathed, smiling up at him. "If you love me—kiss me—and tell me so, John."

He lowered his face close to hers. Her lips were red again.

"Do you mean —— ?" he began, huskily.

"Yes. Ever since the fire. Couldn't you see ?" she answered.

CHAPTER XX

THE "WATER WITCH". THE REFORMATION OF THE ENEMY

JOHN cut away the sleeve of the thin shirt. With shaking fingers he washed the blood away from the white shoulder. Two of the buck-shot had entered the shoulder, near the rounded top of it, and had gone clean through the firm flesh. He bandaged the wounds with strips from her shirt, then put his own coat about her shoulders and buttoned it at the chin. She was sitting up by this time, bright of eyes and cheeks and lips.

"We must start right back," he said. "That shoulder must be properly dressed as soon as possible. Do you feel able to walk part of the way, dear? I will carry you whenever you get tired."

She laughed. "I don't feel strong enough to walk a step," she said.

He stooped and lifted her in his arms, kissed her full on the lips as her head nestled against

his shoulder, and strode away toward the cove. She closed her eyes and sighed blissfully.

"I am utterly happy," she whispered, "so why should I pretend that I am not. I really don't see what your father can do to us now to harm us. Do you, John?"

"He can beggar us all," replied John, cheerfully. "He can ruin your father and cut me off without a cent. It seemed a monstrous thing half an hour ago, but now it seems a joke."

"Put me down now," she said. "I can walk as well as you can. I said I couldn't just because I wanted you to carry me."

"Do you like to be carried?" he asked, with a grin of fond delight and complacency on his face that would have seemed absolutely idiotic to an unprejudiced onlooker.

She opened her eyes at him, wide and bright and tender.

"Then I'll carry you all the way," he said.

Ten minutes later, he said, "Do you remember that afternoon when you looked at my window, when I was a prisoner?"

"No," she said. "I have forgotten all about it."

"I should far rather be killed with an axe than

have you look at me like that again," he said. "You hated and despised me then, didn't you?"

"I didn't know you then, John. I only *thought* that I hated you."

"And when did you change your mind, dear?"

"When I opened my eyes and looked at you when you were carrying me out of the fire. Oh, John dear, I fell in love with you then!"

"Is that a fact, little girl?"

"It is the truth, little boy."

"I fell in love with you that first day, when you looked at me in the window as if I were a dog of some sort. Otherwise, I'd not have felt so broken up about it. The hammering that Hands gave me didn't count at all after that. It was monstrous, little girl. Why were you so heartless? You should have known that I would —love you—the instant I saw you."

And so they wound their artless way homeward across the barrens. John was forced, by a cramp in his right arm, to let Jean walk part of the way. She laughed at his surrender.

"Even though you love me, I weigh one hundred and thirty-five pounds," she said.

At last he snatched her up again in his arms.

At last they reached the tents. Mrs. Went-

worth dressed the girl's shoulder again. The wounds were small and clean. John told the story.

"And what happened to Cox?" asked Wentworth.

"He ran away. I didn't follow him," said John.

"John carried me most of the way home," said Jean. "I was able to walk, but he insisted upon carrying me. He seemed to enjoy it."

John faced her parents with an expression of delighted wonder on his glowing face. He grinned with engaging frankness.

"The fact is, she loves me," he said.

"And what about you?" cried the girl.

"They know that, without being told," he replied. "Everyone knows that. Anyone with half an eye could have seen that any day."

"You have a queer way of showing it," said Jean. "I didn't know, for certain, until to-day. I don't know how I should have found it out if Johnny Cox hadn't shot me."

Mrs. Wentworth's face paled, but she turned toward the door of the tent without a word. But she did not go. John Blessington Wentworth smiled and slipped an arm around his daughter's

waist. His eyes brightened. He extended his right hand to John.

"It is good news to me, John," said he. "You are one of the few men I know whom I'd give her to. Lord, what a valorous thing is Youth! This should bring us luck. Gad, it renews my courage like good wine! Of course, if things go wrong, we'll all be paupers."

"I am able to work," said John. "And your affairs will not go wrong! How could any honest enterprise go wrong now—now that Jean loves me?"

Mrs. Wentworth turned to him at that. There were tears in her eyes.

"Are you so fond of her as that, John?" she asked unsteadily.

"Yes," replied John frankly. "More than that. More than I can explain. But that is not strange. She is the most beautiful thing in God's world—and the best. The queer thing is that she should care for me. That is the wonder of it!"

Mrs. Blessington Wentworth flung her arms around his neck and wept on his shoulder.

Old Sol Mitch, stationed in a little settlement of fishermen about thirty-five miles to the south-

ward, on the look-out for his master's enemies, sighted a big, white, schooner-rigged steam-yacht slipping northward, a mile to seaward. She nosed shoreward and let go an anchor. A boat was launched and pulled away. This was late in the afternoon, and all the skiffs of the place were on the fishing-grounds. Sol Mitch met the gig on the landwash. The mate stepped ashore.

"How d'ye do," said he.

"How do," returned Sol Mitch.

"Do you know this coast?" asked the officer.

"Yep, you bet," said Mitch. He waved his hands in an expansive gesture. "I knows 'im, reef an' tickle, clean to Dead Man's Cape."

"Do you know a place called Fore-an'-Aft Cove?"

"Yep. Live there one time. Damn fine harbour."

"So I've heard. Will you take us in?"

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night. It's only about thirty miles north of here, I think."

"Yep, take you in to-night. Ten dollar—an' five pound baccy."

"Right you are. Step aboard."

When Sol Mitch said that he knew every reef

and tickle of that coast he spoke only a part of the truth. The fact is, he knew every rock, the set of every current at every season of the year, and in his younger days had often gone to the assistance of befogged vessels and piloted them safely into harbour or clear of the coast. He climbed to the bridge of the "Water Witch," and his first words of direction to the quarter-master satisfied the officer on duty that this was a man who knew his job. So the anchor was snatched up and the big yacht continued on her northward journey, curving cleanly away from the coast under the old Indian's guttural commands.

Sol Mitch strutted on the bridge, a proud man but a figure of fun. He looked down upon the gleaming decks, and out upon the bright waters and blinked his round, black eyes like lightning. His brown, wrinkled face seemed to be nothing but skin and bone. His nose was like a beak. His long white hair stuck out in wisps and tail from under his cap, on all sides. He was attired in his oldest garments and his oldest skinny-woppers. A bright red scarf was tied airily, around his scrawny neck—a point of colour to be remarked from afar.

"Fine vessel," said the captain indulgently.

"Pretty damn fine little ship," replied Sol Mitch, flickering his lids over his inscrutable eyes and grinning sardonically.

The owner of the "Water Witch" came on deck, and climbed heavily to the bridge. This was about six o'clock. He was a big man; but he moved now as if his legs were not strong enough for the weight of his body. His big face was grey and thin. He was muffled up in a thick overcoat. He scanned the sea and the coast, then turned his pale, unfriendly eyes upon the pilot. Sol Mitch blinked at him.

"How long before we get to Fore-and-Aft Cove?" asked the owner.

"'Bout ten mile furder," said the Indian.

"Do you know a man named Luke Cassin? A trader?"

Sol Mitch felt reasonably sure that if the trader were aboard the yacht he would have shown himself before this; in fact, if Cassin were aboard, the schooner would not have stopped for a pilot.

"Yep. He sell me some damn poor baccy one day," he said.

"Do you live in Fore-and-Aft Cove?"

"Nope. One time—not now."

"Do you know a big man named Blessington —a rich man."

"Yep," replied Mitch, and tapped his forehead with a long finger.

"Do you mean that he's crazy?" asked the owner incredulously.

"Crack," replied Mitch composedly.

"Cassin did not say so."

"Luke Cassin one damn liar—an' two fools in one skin."

Sol Mitch knew that this big man was the menace that his master feared. He knew what to do, as far as the schooner was concerned; but not being sure of the wisest way to answer the big man's questions he lied as a matter of course. The owner stared at him coldly.

"I don't like your face, my good fellow," he said.

"I like yours fine. You got damn fine big face," returned Mitch calmly.

The owner turned, descended slowly to the deck and vanished.

"Mr. Blizzard is a sick man," said the captain. "Lord, I never saw any man not in the doctor's hands fail so fast."

Sol Mitch grunted and scanned the waters ahead.

The early twilight was still bright and clear

though the sun was half sunk dehind the hills, when the "Water Witch" slid slowly up abreast of the little harbour. Mitch glanced ashore. He saw men gathering among the cabins of the cove, with guns in their hands. He turned his eyes upon the still waters under the bows and to port and starboard. Then he took the little wheel from the hands of the quartermaster. The boat was steaming at about six knots. He swung her head shoreward and ran her fairly across the back of that flat and hidden rock known to the folk of that coast as Dead Skipper's Dinner-Table. She stopped with a grinding, crunching shiver, listed sharply to port, and lay still. Sol Mitch grunted, scrambled away from the wheel and up the slanting bridge, turned, pulled a revolver from his pocket, and grinned sardonically at the captain and quartermaster sprawling below him.

"Guess I bring you in pretty good," he said. "Dis here Fore-an'-Aft Cove a'right. How you like 'im, anyhow?"

The owner came cursing up from the cabin and slid across the listed deck to the port rail.

A skiff was pulling off from the shore. Two men were at the oars and one man stood upright in the bows.

"John," bellowed the owner from the rail of the stranded yacht.

The man in the bows of the skiff waved his hand. A minute later the skiff ran along side and John Blizzard stepped aboard. His father seized him with both hands and clung to him. John was amazed and shocked at the greyness of the other's face and at the shrunken outlines of it. His eyes softened for an instant, then hardened again.

"Are you free, John? Have you escaped them?" asked the owner.

"I don't know what you are talking about," replied John, "but I am anxious to know what has brought you to this place?"

The owner stared and swore.

"God, man, is this the way to talk to your father?" he cried.

"Heroics are out of place here," said John coldly. "You are my father, I'll admit, and for that reason I left New York and hid myself in the wilderness. I couldn't stand the disgrace of being your son among people who know you and your ways. That is the truth, sir, and I hoped that you would have sense enough to see it. Evidently you didn't. I suppose you are here

with some idea of taking me back to New York with you. That is out of the question. You have seen Luke Cassin, but you have not seen the couple of murderers you sent in, from Quebec, a few months ago. Damn it, sir, you are a coward!"

H. P. Blizzard breathed heavily and his grey face flushed darkly.

"That's no way to talk," he said. "That's no way to talk, confound you! You're a fool, John —and you've been listening to fools. I'll cut you off with a dollar for this—if you don't change your tune. I'll make a beggar of you. You're a traitor to your own blood. . . . I'm a sick man, John—and yet you stand there and insult me—you, my own son! What d'you mean by it? Tell me that, confound you!"

"I am sorry that you are not well, sir," returned John politely. "I am staying with some people of whom you have heard, I think. You remember a family of the name of Wentworth, doubtless? You did your best to ruin them, about eight years ago. Well, here they are. They are my friends."

"Fine friends," sneered the other. "Why did John B. Wentworth pretend to be dead? Why

has he hidden in this place all these years? You call me a coward, but what about this fellow who hides here in this forsaken hole?"

"He had his own reasons for hiding," answered John. "Doubtless you will hear of them some day."

"He's up to some of his old tricks, is he?" cried the owner of the "Water Witch." "Damn him! Doesn't he know when he's beaten? Why, the darned fool is dead, anyway—by law. He's been dead for seven years. Oh, it won't take me long to find out what he's been up to!"

"I think you forget that you are stranded," said John. "I hope you are well provisioned, for you'll be here quite a while. If we have any very heavy weather, you'll have to come ashore."

H. P. Blizzard clung to the rail and gaped at his son.

"What do you mean by that, John?" he asked weakly.

"She's stranded hard and fast, and here she'll stay," replied John. "By the way, one of those precious spies you sent in tried to murder me the other day—the second attempt—and wounded the girl I'm engaged to marry. She is doing splendidly however. The wound was a slight one. Your other employee tried to shoot me up

too, but he did not make a success of it. Fact is, he got killed for his trouble. It makes me quite ill to think of the amount of blood and tears you have on your conscience."

A shiver went through H. P. Blizzard's bowed frame. He swallowed hard and glanced at his son with haggard eyes.

"Who is the woman?" he asked.

"Mr. Wentworth's daughter," replied John.

"Do you mean to try to hold us prisoners aboard this wreck?" asked the father.

"We mean to do just that," replied the son.

The other laughed derisively.

"Why, you young fool, I'll have an armed tug up here inside ten days," he cried. "Then what will become of your precious friends?—or of you, for that matter?"

John smiled. "The coastal steamers don't come within sight of this harbour," he said. Then he turned to the bridge and produced a revolver. "Captain Murphy," he shouted, "come here."

The captain came, accompanied by Sol Mitch.

"Murphy, who is the owner of this yacht?" queried John.

"Why, sir—for that matter—you are the owner," replied the captain, disjointedly. "But

—but I guess 'twas your father bought her and found her."

"What the devil do you mean by bringing her on a voyage like this without my orders?" cried John. "And what the devil do you mean by running her on to this rock, in fine, clear weather? You should lose your ticket for this! Have the wireless equipment knocked away from the top immediately. Mitch, step over to that door and shoot anyone who tries to get in."

The wireless equipment was put out of business. The operator, and the schooner's small-arms, were sent ashore. Five armed men were brought aboard from the village. John remained aboard all night, and all the next day. H. P. Blizzard retired to his own suite of rooms and remained there. Before night Hands came aboard and John went ashore. And so a week passed without any further communication between father and son, though John visited the stranded schooner every day. H. P. Blizzard kept to his own quarters and was waited upon by his man. The captain and the wireless operator were housed ashore, but the rest of the yacht's company remained aboard, in the care of Alfred Hands and a crew of five fishermen.

On the morning of the eighth day after Sol Mitch's clever performance, H. P. Blizzard sent word ashore that he wanted to speak to his son. John pulled aboard in a skiff and followed Daws, the valet, to his father's quarters. He found his disgraceful parent in an arm-chair, with his feet braced against the port bulkhead of the cabin.

"Good morning, sir," said John. "What can I do for you?"

His father looked at him with brighter eyes and a brighter face than he had shown a week ago.

"Sit down, John," he said. "Daws, you get out."

"I think you would be more comfortable ashore," said John. "You must find this list very trying."

"John, I'm beaten," replied H. P. "You've got me where you want me. What'll you take to call it off and let me go back to my business?"

"I must keep you here until November," said John.

"I've thought it all out," said the other. "I see Wentworth's game. He means to work a revolution on me. I would have suspected it long ago if I had not thought him dead. And he means to spring it in November, does he? Does he really intend to let you marry his girl?"

"Yes," replied John.

"As a reward for getting me into this trap, I suppose?"

"No. But why do you call this a trap? You came here of your own free will. We didn't want you here, heaven knows!"

"You've more brains than I gave you credit for, John. But I must get back to New York! My affairs are all going to the devil! See here, son, I'll retire from that South American business without a kick if you'll let me go—and if you and the girl will get married immediately. That will be a good match for you, John—even if she does happen to be the daughter of a dead man. Get a missionary, and splice up, and give me your word that you'll let me go immediately after the wedding, and we'll step off at the nearest lawyer's and fix up the South American business. Otherwise, keep me here as long as you can—and I'll fight—and it's even chances Wentworth will lose his stakes. Think of the bloodshed you'll save."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To tell you the truth, John, I've lost my

stomach for trouble—and I'd be glad to have you married to that Wentworth girl. I'm growing old—and my nerve is going. I've been worrying about that deal with Wentworth lately—and other deals I've put through. Of course, if I could see my way to it, I'd fight, but you've got me tight, and my business needs me. That South American property has always been more trouble than it was worth, anyway. . . . Your mother has been muck-raking, too, John. She knows why you left New York. She belongs to a proud family, John—and so do these Wentworths. I never did. My father hadn't a grain of self-respect in his make-up. . . . The truth is, John, I am sick of being a crook. It didn't worry me much until you and your mother found me out. . . . Tell Wentworth that if he'll come aboard I'll beg his pardon and talk business with him."

John returned to the shore. He could scarcely bring himself to believe that his father meant what he had said. He explained the matter briefly to Mr. Wentworth and delivered his father's message.

The wind blew up strong from the north-west while Wentworth was aboard the "Water Witch".

Mrs. Wentworth, Jean, and John awaited his return on the landwash. The skiff put off from the stranded schooner at last and pulled swiftly into the harbour. Wentworth sprang ashore and grasped John's hand.

"Your father is an extraordinary man," he said. "I am convinced that he means what he says, this time. We talked together for over an hour. Your mother—and his present position—have shown him the error of his ways. He thinks that the simplest way to arrange it is for him to sell all his South American properties and concessions and rights to Jean, for one dollar apiece. He has signed an agreement to do this at the first opportunity. You and Jean and Hands must go to New York with him and see to it, but, first of all, we must raise a parson of some sort and have a wedding. He seems to be very keen about the wedding. In the meantime, all hands must come ashore. The yacht won't hang together six hours in this sea—and the wind is strengthening every minute."

So all the skiffs in the harbour were sent out to the stranded schooner and all hands were brought ashore. The Wentworths remained on the landwash. As Mr. H. P. Blizzard stepped

weakly over the bows, muffled in an overcoat and rug, Jean hastened forward.

"Let me help you," she said.

The pirate looked at her, lifted his hat, and took her arm without a word. John hastened to his father's assistance; and together the young people took him up the cliff and to his tent.

The wind arose to a gale. The big white yacht heaved and groaned upon the rock, sheeted in spray. Toward evening the coastal steamer came tearing in from the open sea, driven to seek shelter in the humble harbour of Fore-and-Aft Cove. She passed the breaking yacht and let her anchor go in the little haven.

Consternation seized the hearts of the Wentworths at the sight. The gale had turned the table on them; and by the fateful and unexpected arrival of the steamer they were placed at the mercy of the unscrupulous H. P. Blizzard. Already a boat from the steamer was pulling shoreward. Blizzard sent for John and Wentworth. He grinned at them.

"I'm glad I didn't know that this would happen a few hours ago," he said. "The temptation would have been too much for me, I fear. Lord, what a chance! But don't worry. I'm a reformed

character. I wouldn't go back on that girl who gave me her arm up from the shore for five millions. Just see if they happen to have some sort of sky-pilot aboard, who is qualified to tie a knot, will you, Mr. Wentworth. With luck we'll have a wedding to-night and sail for New York as soon as the wind blows out."

"Shake hands on that, Hiram Blizzard!" cried John B. Wentworth.

THE END

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